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A PRIVATE IN THE GUARDS



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TORONTO

A PRIVATE IN THE GUARDS

BY

STEPHEN GRAHAM

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NOTE

THE Joy-Dance of the children at Marchiennes appeared in the Saturday Westminster Gazette ; the account of how we followed the pipers into Germany was written in the Times. Part of Little Sparta was published in the Spectator. The major part of the opening notes on Discipline appeared in the English Review, and of the finale on Esprit de Corps in the Red Triangle. To the Editors of these journals the author desires to express his thanks for their accustomed courtesy and kindness.

I thank also H. B. C. and W. E. and A. C. who read the proofs, also all comrades who in one way or another helped me to write the story.

STEPHEN GRAHAM.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. NOTES ON DISCIPLINE	I
II. LITTLE SPARTA BARRACKS	22
III. SOLDIER AND CIVILIAN	82
IV. ESPRIT DE CORPS	110
V. TO THE FRONT	127
VI. THE SPIRIT OF THE BATTALION	149
VII. WAYS OF THINKING AND TALKING	181
VIII. FRANCE UNDER THE CLOUD	198
IX. WAR THE BRUTALISER	212
X. BRINGING BACK THE BODY OF MR. B——	223
XI. AS TOUCHING THE DEAD	238
XII. PADRES AND OFFICERS	250
XIII. THE GREAT ADVANCE	259
XIV. THE MARCH TO THE RHINE	292
XV. THE FINEST THING IN THE ARMY	343
INDEX	351

I

NOTES ON DISCIPLINE

THE sterner the discipline the better the soldier, the better the army. This is not a matter of debate at this point, for it is a well-established military principle and all nations act on it. A strong discipline is the foundation of heroic exploits in the field. In time of necessity, when a thousand men must fight to the last though all be wounded or killed, in order that a much larger number may march into safety, it is only a strongly disciplined body that will not accept prematurely the chance to surrender. When small parties of men get cut off from the main body or lose themselves in the enemy's lines they can nearly always injure or kill a few of the enemy and sometimes many before they themselves are put out of action. It is only men who have been taught never to entertain the thought of surrender who will do this. Poorly trained troops are always ready to "hands up." When in general action of any kind the front-line troops frequently find themselves in face of what seems inevitable death, and the impulse may come to stampede and run for it, causing endless confusion

in the rear and giving the battle to the enemy. But sternly disciplined troops know that if they run from the face of the enemy they will be shot down from behind, and indeed they would themselves be ready to shoot down inferior troops stampeding through their lines. They do not entertain the hope of escape, and consequently their minds are at rest—as the mind of the machine - gunner voluntarily chained to his machine may be said to be at rest. The avenue to the rear is absolutely closed up *in the mind*. Such equanimity is produced by discipline. Stern discipline can manufacture collective heroism.

Modern warfare is predominantly one of machines. The human element on the positive side is valuable and perhaps indispensable for victory, but the human element on the negative side is dangerous and absolutely out of place. In fact, for the private soldier in action the one thing needful is obedience. Imagination, thought, fear, love, and even hate are out of place, and through stern discipline these can be excluded. He needs to be at least as dependable as the machines. The whole army has to work like a machine, and the weakest bit in it will be the first to give way. Discipline is the necessary hardening and making dependable. The best troops, however, have a little bit of energy and movement over for when the machines go wrong.

A human being is naturally undisciplined. In fact, some animals have much more discipline in them and more obvious capabilities for discipline than a man. Because a man has thought

and conscience but they have not. Personal conscience is one of the hardest things to modify or eliminate in any training. And yet it may be one of the most dangerous things that can be left. For it may easily turn a man from obedience to his superior officer at a critical moment. It may suggest pity for a wounded enemy or would-be-enemy prisoner with whom the army dare not encumber itself. It may cause the hand to waver at the moment it should strike without hesitation. In short, it may whisper in the soldier's ear the dreadful monition, "Thou shalt not kill." It may give him sleepless nights and unfit him for duty when, if he had the simple army conscience, which is founded on implicit obedience, he might leave all responsibility on the shoulders of his superior officers and sleep like a child and awake refreshed—to kill and fear not.

Once a Taffy was troubled by his conscience. The sergeant said, "Don't you worry, I'll go to hell for it. You will be found innocent on the Day of Judgment." But the sergeant received his orders from the platoon commander, so he should also stand white before the Throne and the young officer be to blame. The platoon commander, however, had it from the captain of the company, the captain from the C.O. of the battalion, he from his brigadier, the brigadier-general from a major-general commanding a division, he in turn from the army corps commander, and he from the Commander-in-Chief. So if there is sin, it is the Commander-in-Chief

who should go to the fire for it, if not otherwise saved by his Redeemer.

But the Welshman, who was one of those who pursue Truth ungraciously, found that ultimate responsibility did not lie with the Army but with the Prime Minister, who was in turn responsible to Parliament, and Parliament was responsible to the whole people of Great Britain. That brought it back to the unwilling Welshman, and he said, "You see, I should go to hell for it after all."

I am afraid it is rather a matter for a Socrates or a Plato to decide.

It is a palpable fact, however, that an army not founded on the responsibility of some one else would fare disastrously in the field and would disperse as did the Russian Army at the Revolution. And if the army fared thus, the nation might pass into bondage.

But the national will is toward victory, and no one wishes to be a slave. Hence the unquestioned sway of discipline in time of war.

The enforcement of this discipline, however, is often more terrible than the ordeal by battle itself. After what a man goes through when he is properly trained he will suffer comparatively little in the face of the foe. Or, to put it in another way—the task of the N.C.O. or officer at the front in handling well-disciplined men is child's play compared with the task of breaking them in from civilised happiness and culture.

It has always to be borne in mind that the drill-sergeant is training men, not so much to drill correctly and smartly in the end of ends as to go

unflinchingly to death or murder in war, and for that purpose he has not only to train the muscles but to break or bend the intelligence. In a great war where every class of educated or uneducated man is called up it is a Herculean task.

The easiest to train are no doubt the youngest, those nearest to school-life, those accustomed to obedience in the family, in the workshop and factory. It is harder to discipline the developed working-man who has "rights" and grievances, who resorts to Trade Unions, and thinks his sorrows aired in *John Bull* can bring about a revolution. Clerks are on the whole a little more difficult to handle, though they are inclined to give in sooner than the working-man. Middle-aged men of any class need a hard battering to reduce their pride in self, their sense of being older. Professional men of any age are harder still, and I suppose musicians, artists, poets are often hardest of all and belong to a class of impossibles. A squad of the recruits of any regiment at any time in the war presented an extraordinary variety of types, professions, ages.

But if the comment may sometimes arise, "How unjust and disgusting that a man of refinement or of letters or of acknowledged 'position' should be subjected to such verbal brutality and insult as I have seen," it must be remembered that it can all be justified on the higher ground of discipline. All manner of substantial men, the most able, proud, well-known, respected in our common life and culture of England, have been reduced to type for the

use of the machine. If they had not been thus reduced, where would England be to-day?

The only legitimate objection that can be raised is that very often the most intelligent were bludgeoned down to be war-slaves whereas the most stupid got through to places of authority. That is true, but it raises another question.

The general assumption is that a large intelligence is not necessary in war. A limited intelligence is more useful. No one may go far in original warfare except an army chief. Obedience rules.

The war, of course, caught Britain unawares. A fighting force had to be provided at once. But the population had not been sorted out, and the Government did not know the resources of *quality* which it had. It had only time for *quantity*. It would be agreed that the army could not afford to "entertain strangers" on the assumption that they might be angels unawares. So once you were in the army it has not mattered what you were in civil life, a green youth or a father of ten, the man with the muck-cart or a professor, you were (and are) (if not now incapacitated) a man, an effective, a *bayonet*.

As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
 Shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves are clept
 All by the name of dogs: the valued file
 Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle
 The house-keeper, the hunter,—every one
 According to the gift which bounteous nature
 Hath in him closed; whereby he does receive
 Particular addition, from the bill
 That writes them all alike: and so of men.

The valued file can only come into use again with Peace. Then the "bayonets" will turn into poets, ploughmen, philosophers, butlers, gamekeepers, and the rest.

There must at least be fifty occasions in our war in which the conduct of the Light Brigade has been equalled. But the extra glory remains with the Light Brigade because the army of those days was less disciplined and more individual than the army of to-day. The soldier knew "some one had blundered." But now a charge of the Light Brigade is all in the day's work, and it doesn't matter whether some one has blundered or no.

In this war men have craved wounds to get release, and have jumped for death because it was better than life—life under the new discipline. Rage has accumulated that could never be expressed except in ferocity against the enemy. And such habits of patience under suffering have been formed as could not be exhausted. And whenever one more rash and intemperate than the rest has rebelled against a superior officer, the wiser and more experienced have said to him, "Don't be a fool, if you go against the army the army will break you."

Or another has said, "Grouse¹ about it. Have a good grouse and you'll feel better for it." For grousing harms no one but your own spiritual

¹ *Grouse*, a vulgar word for a vulgar thing—to let oneself be impotently angry.

self. It is damp anger and will never ignite to action, never flame out in mutiny. It is what all slaves do—grouse together in the gloaming and rage impotently against their masters. Grousing is not only compatible with discipline, but is an inevitable accompaniment of it, and is recognised as harmless. Even when a private talks of shooting his own sergeant or company officer in the next mêlée if he has a chance—it is nonsense, for he will never do it. Instead he will fight the enemy more bitterly and put all his humiliation and resentment into his bayonet and his bullets. Even in extremity, when his comrades are perishing all around him and he stands in the gap with heroical aspect, he will have a strange satisfaction and peace of heart in blazing away at the foe, at having his face to him and being in the action of killing him. Then the wide circling arm of the machine-gun sweeps round and he is brought down to earth—one more victim sacrificed upon the European altar.

I do not know why the various occasions on which battalions have fought till there were merely a few score survivors have not been properly chronicled, but have been veiled in such phrases as “magnificent conduct of the Stafforshire,” “grim determination of the Cheshire,” “gallant fighting of the London Scottish.” It is a laconic way of telling you that certain platoons or companies fought shoulder to shoulder till the last man dropped and would not give in, or that they were shelled to nothingness, or getting

over the top they went forward till they all withered away under machine-gun fire, or that detail after detail of bombers passed up the communication trench treading on the bodies of those who had gone before. More V.C.'s have gone to the dead than to the living, have they not? Though indeed it is not a fitting token for the dead—the dead have the Cross of their Redemption. But it is perhaps amusing to the gods "who smile in secret" when, a fortnight after some exploit, a field-marshall or divisional-general comes down to a battalion to thank it for its gallant conduct and fancies for a moment, perchance, that he is looking at the men who did the deed of valour, and not at a large draft that has just been brought up from England and the base to fill the gap. He should ask the services of the chaplain and make his congratulations in the graveyard, or go to the hospitals and make them there.

Still, he means well, and there is no military grievance against him. The war is to be carried on by the living and the whole, and in congratulating the live battalion he inculcates in a most powerful way the tradition of the regiment. After all, if half the men have not yet suffered they assuredly will soon, and they will deserve congratulation in due course. Moreover, it becomes easier to do your bit when you realise you are not the first to do it. The more men die the easier it becomes to die. Death becomes cheaper and cheaper. It becomes a matter of the everyday.

Still the official class may not soon be forgiven for withholding the desperate details of scores of glorious passages of arms. It is not enough to thank regiments publicly or mention them unless the public can be made to realise that a fine restraint prevents us from making solemn and national every occasion of great devotion to duty. The common feeling must be that—add together the heroic occasions of all our historic wars, Spanish Succession, Seven Years, Peninsular, Napoleonic, Crimean, and they would not exceed in number those of this war of 1914—1918. And in the achievement hundreds of thousands of anonymous heroes, poor obedient soldiers, have perished. Dead ere their prime—

Without the need of some melodious tear.

I do not know whether the story will ever be told or if it will ever be realised. “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever, its loveliness can never pass away.” But the deed of beauty? The candle which once lit can never be put out? Have the candles ever been lit? Are not an infinite series of heroic actions and pathetic if noble human sacrifices swallowed up in the darkness of Time, still-born in oblivion? The night after night of holding the line, the standing fast against machine-gunnery, against the methodically destructive fire of the guns, against the suffocating streams of poison gas, the men entangled in the wire and killed as in a trap, the men drowned in the mud, the countless series of occasions when a few stood together

heroically against terrible odds and were mown down, but not defeated, by the machinery of destruction.

The frustate red blaze of artillery over the pale faces of humanity night after night in the despicable mud-beds of the trenches ; the bright eyes of live soldiers, the sodden corpses of dead soldiers, the stars in the remote heavens, the deathless thoughts and impulses in heart and mind. In the living poem of man's life the sacrifice of our men and their triumph swells as an eternal chorus—even though we cannot hear it.

It was decided in 1917 that after the war a monument would be raised on every battle-field in France and Flanders, graven with the names of the dead, and that underneath the names should be written some fitting motto. It was regarded as essential that the motto should be the same on all the monuments, but a suitable motto had not been found. A committee was at work deliberating on the details and trying to decide what the motto should be. And one evening in the New Year, shortly after I had come up to London from that "Little Sparta" where I was trained, I met at a friend's house other friends and we discussed this fascinating and (I think) sacred choice. Certain celebrated men had made suggestions—so one who was on the committee said—and he gave us a list of mottoes, such as :

and

They died for Freedom,

and

What I gave I have,

My utmost for the Highest,

and Kipling's happy words :

Who stands if Freedom fall?

Who dies if England live?

“ Go tell to Sparta ” was mentioned, and in putting the choice to the company we were set thinking about the war and the soldier in a special way. It touched each man's heart and made him responsive to the great tragedy in France. Some of the suggestions might seem prosaic and ordinary, set down coldly in print, but with the thoughts of the heart softening and spiritualising them as they were said, each had a poetry of its own. The truest note of the evening seemed to me to be in words suggested by one of the company : “ *By their sacrifice we live* ” or in “ *They died that we might live*, ” and I should have liked that to stand. The one that had most favour was : “ *My utmost for the Highest*, ” a celestial motto for the living, but perhaps too striving for those who now

sleep, sweetly sleep,
Whilst the days and the years roll by.

One thought that seemed to weigh was that the motto would be equally acceptable to Mohammedans and to Christians alike, and that “ *By their sacrifice we live* ” was too Christian an idea. And being fresh from Little Sparta barracks I

thought to myself : If the mystical Christian idea of sacrifice is not available, why not the Spartan splendour of discipline, and

Tell to Sparta thou that passest by,
That here obedient to her laws we lie.

Since then a motto has been chosen—the one found by Kipling in *Ecclesiasticus* :

Their Name liveth for evermore,

which for us means that their fame liveth for ever, their good name liveth for ever, and mankind will be eternally grateful to those who died to rid us of tyranny and war. Perhaps what the soldiers have done *is* destined to be more recognised as years go on. As it is, in the war we have thought too lightly of our men in their wounds and their death. There has been too little sense of gratitude to the man who has laid down his life on the altar. Because it was his *duty* he was doing, because we knew him disciplined to go to it unflinching, we have involuntarily discounted his sacrifice. At home munition-workers and civilians of all kinds lived in comfort and in money and bought War Loan stock and felt they also were “doing their bit,” as if there were any similarity between their lives and those of the men at the front. The soldier also was *doing his duty*. The idea of duty rather than of sacrifice has prevailed—something *due paid* rather than of something *sacred made*. And yet every man who died on these fields was offered up on the altar for Europe’s sins.

If, however, officialdom which has controlled the Press and other channels of public expression be reproached later on that not enough was made of the many marvellous occasions of the war when our boys stood their ground and perished, the answer will allow us to imply that the said boys died in the execution of their duty. Officialdom in its own carefully locked-up mind will reflect that the deaths were sad, but that the men, being under most rigorous discipline, had no option of facing the enemy or fleeing, and that consequently somewhat less honour is due to them. It is not worth while sending for the poet laureate to give him special details. He can pick up an idea now and then in the articles in the Press. Moreover, the actual facts might cause criticism of military direction and of the Government. There political discipline sets in, and that is as binding as the military sort.

There is something quite sound about the thought. Discipline does discount the *merit* of certain actions. When it would be so damnable to disobey, obedience becomes matter-of-fact. But there is one thing it does not discount, and that is the sufferings. Though we may not over-praise those who were marshalled to die for us, we ought to remember what they have suffered.

The later armies have fought as well as the earlier ones. Kitchener's Army was as firm as the "Peace-time Army," the Conscripts were as firm as either, and in the later stages when so many men of poor health and diverse infirmities were sent to the firing-line, they stood their

ground as well as any others. Some fell sick more quickly and were sent back as unfit, but as long as they remained in the line, no matter how bad they felt, they kept their faces to the foe and made him pay for any advance. In the newspaper which circulates most at the front we read, about the middle of April 1918 : "War is like the service of the Tenebrae, in which one by one the lights are extinguished. Class after class, generation after generation is receiving its summons to the battle-field and passing that the light of freedom may still burn strong." This is truer than a phrase in the same paper a week later, in which it refers to France as "a tilting-ground of generous youth." In the fourth year of the war it is the last and least soldier-like classes who are coming in, the older, the more frail, the men well established in commerce or in industrialism, the men who could not be spared. It might have been thought that these levies would make indifferent troops. It has often been said of the Germans that their later recruits were of such a miserable class that they were little good in the fighting-line. Perhaps our journalists have been misled, and the worst class of Germans were almost as useful to the German Army as the best. So also with us. All other deficiencies can be made up by discipline. And never in history have such disciplined armies fought one another. It must have been the Germans who discovered the new scientific military discipline, and all Europe has had to copy her.

It is not to say that all units of the armies have exhibited a model behaviour under all circumstances, least of all in the German Army, where often something seems to have gone wrong with scientific discipline when pushed too far. Our British Army has been very mixed. There is a division which is composed of the five most Spartan regiments of the British Army, and these have exhibited an iron discipline, one which Germany herself would have coldly appraised at its true worth. But, on the other hand, we have put splendid troops into the field, such as the first contingent of the Canadians and the Australians, undisciplined and individualistic, destined at first to be wrecked in the conflict and to cause trouble until taken in hand. The latter in course of time came to the level of the very best the British Army system could produce, and many of their units could be compared with our Spartans for tenacity and obedience. Discipline had been introduced. And although the process of being disciplined is hard—hard to enforce and hard to undergo—it is difficult to understand why the discipline and training of our Spartan division (six months instead of three) were not applied to the whole British Army—since we were fighting Germany with Germany's own weapons, and not turning the other cheek or doing anything “romantic.” Indeed if all had been trained like the Guards, it seems probable the German Army would have been defeated in the field earlier and with greater military calamity than in November 1918.

It was a platitude of the fighting period that discipline would win the war, as it is now a platitude that discipline has won it. Germany went into battle with Prussian discipline and plenty of brains but without a cause, and without the *esprit de corps* which comes of a cordial understanding between officer and man. Britain went in with a splendid cause, not over much brain, a fair discipline, and a good deal of the *esprit de corps* which comes from officers and men understanding one another. The German discipline failed. Our splendid cause won.

Our discipline even at its worst or best, let us say at its harshest, has been upheld by the sense of a true moral cause, and it has been tempered by something which our officers brought into the army, something which the German officers were not allowed to bring, or did not possess to bring. Their system was based exclusively on fear. *The men hated their officers, but were afraid of them.* They dared not disobey whatever they were asked to do, however dangerous.

Our men are different in this way. They admire their officers, and more readily sacrifice their own lives seeing their leaders sacrifice theirs.

German intensified discipline made it possible for them to launch attacks led by the men themselves whilst the officers remained in comparative safety behind. In the large attack of March 1918 it supported that fine flower of the system, the advance parties of wonderful wire-cutters absolutely foredoomed to destruction. And in

the grand retreat of the armies in October and November of the same year it could still provide those machine-gunners who won the admiration even of their enemies. In our attacks, however, the officers have led the men, and though losses in personnel have been disproportionately great, the troops thus led have generally behaved better than the Germans. There has been less surrender. Parties have fought stubbornly after they have been surrounded and when there was no chance of escape. But the Germans obtained a name for themselves by shouting out *Kamerad*, *Kamerad*, and wishing to surrender the moment they were cut off or felt safe from the disciplinary shots from behind.

In our army undoubtedly men who broke and ran might expect to be shot down by those in reserve, and a party trying to arrange a surrender might be subjected to machine-gun fire. We shoot our cowards at dawn, we shoot also sentries found asleep at their posts, we make an example and give the death penalty to officers or men making mistakes which have led to disaster. The soldier is completely at the mercy of the army, and even though originally a volunteer he has no appeal against any punishment. Punishment and fear are his background.

But he contrives to forget that negative side of his life, though always aware of it in an habitual sense, and he develops something on the positive side—a patient sense of sacrifice and an understanding that the nation as a whole is fighting. He forgets all the insults and pettinesses of army

life, and fights, as one who is in duty bound to fight, for family, home, ideals.

This, I feel, is achieved by the leadership and kindness of our officers as a whole. Our officers are brave men ; from a ranker's point of view they are not themselves particularly disciplined. Their discipline is of a different type from that of the men and refers to higher things. For leadership personality is required, and that the system leaves to the officer. He is a "sportsman," a "good sort," he's "the finest man ever was in this regiment"—these are common ever-repeated remarks about officers. Not that the officers are really near the men : a great gulf divides them socially, and must do so, but the men would not follow so well an officer who was too free with them.

Then the officer, being presumably rich and of the class of masters, is seen to suffer as much and more on the field of battle, and Tommy realises that we are all in it and have only devised the rules of discipline for the greatest good of all.

By the way, it is often said that the N.C.O.'s run the army, and that the officers might be dispensed with, or at least more promotions be made from the one class to the other. But that is a fallacy. We all know that "the backbone of the army is the non-commissioned man." But those who have been through the mill of the army know that discipline and *esprit de corps* and justice depend more on the character of the officers than on anything else. The officers demand discipline, the N.C.O.'s enforce it.

N.C.O.'s are much more frequently hated than are officers. They understand how to bully and drive and terrify and even batter soldiers into shape, but they seldom possess the personality and character through which discipline can be perfected. There is a point where the deadliness of sergeants must cease and the fineness of the calm officer comes in, enabling the men to go into battle as *camarades de guerre*, following a brave leader, and not merely as military slaves.

If we had all understood Christianity as Tolstoy understood it, Germany would have won. If we had all been merely brave and gone out to fight moved by the Spirit we should probably have lost. These facts we knew, and although the seeming defeat of the ideal might have been more glorious and even more serviceable to humanity as a whole than the prolonged conflict, we chose to fight Germany in Germany's way. We imitated her machines, including the greatest of all, namely, the man-machine, whose principle is discipline. Perhaps in our way we have improved that machine and shown where its defects lie. The curious discovery has been made by both sides that men of all ages, classes, temperaments, and states of health can be fitted into it, and the weakest individuals will often fight the best. Now that the war is over, however, we must not forget that for many the greatest ordeal was not the field of battle but the field of training, where men, infinitely diverse in character, originality, and expression, were

standardised to become interchangeable parts in the fighting machine.

What our men of all ages, professions, and temperaments had to go through to become soldiers ! And then how stern and choiceless the road to victory and death !

II

LITTLE SPARTA BARRACKS

“To the Asylum and Barracks” says a finger-post pointing upward to Little Sparta, and you climb the hill to the place where you must serve as a novice in soldiering. The lunatic asylum and the barracks stand side by side, and the ineffable sergeant-instructor when he has you in his care is bound to inquire whether by chance you have climbed over the wall.

As you climb the steep hill you inevitably wonder what sort of gruelling you will be put through in the famous soldier factory. It has a fame which is somewhat thrilling, the severest training-ground in England, the place where the most rigorous discipline in Europe is maintained. Not even Prussian Guards had a more terrible time in the making. “If you go to Little Sparta it’s kill or cure.” “If you don’t break down during the training you’ve got a remarkably fine constitution.” “If you get through your course at Little Sparta you can get through anything.”

There is a poor but large village without village life, long lines of poor cottages and poky,

mysterious shops ; there are sweet-stuff shops, tea-shops, cobblers' shops, diminutive drapers, and crowded little grocers, where the soldiers buy macaroni boxes to make their packs square ; there is the Asylum tavern, there is a row of labourers' cottages with lodgings for men who live out, and just outside the gates the little establishment where a man and his wife make a living by selling the soldiers sausage and mashed. At night there is ever the characteristic tramp of guardsmen's feet, the steady beat of army boots as twos and threes stamp past in the style learned upon the barrack square.

Civilians have a garishly emaciated look beside the robust recruits, there is a curious humility about their ways, a gentleness, a hesitancy. But even the recruit of a week has a self-assurance and resoluteness which make one feel that khaki has the future with it, and that the men in black belong to an order which is passing away. Fallacious thought !

Little Sparta is, however, the one first-class institution of this place. In the midst of a sort of down-at-heel outer Suburbia it is thorough, and knows it. A fine sentry is pacing to and fro at the gate. A picquet, in voluminous great-coat and freshly khakied belt, is standing to attention with cane in hand waiting to be sent on a message that may break the tedium of his two-hour immobility. There stands the gloomy guard-house, with its cells for misdemeanants. Beyond that, but just inside the gates, is the abortive-looking church, which looks as if religion

had with difficulty been squeezed in ; after the church is the barrack square, where pandemonium reigns, and all manner of tiny groups of recruits are marching and counter-marching, and yelling numbers at the top of their voices ; beyond the square stand the blocks of the barrack buildings, fine and stern and gloomy, high and many-windowed.

“ What a lot of queer fellows come in at this gate,” says a Bill Brown to a Taffy as I enter the barracks in civilian attire on the day of enlistment. “ Yes, they come in queer, but they all pass out the same in three months,” says the Welshman.

I realise that I have entered the soldier factory in which you go in at one end civilian and pass out eventually at the other soldier of the King. And this was a very special type of factory, with a very special type of product. The soldiers made here were supposed to be much more deadly to the enemy than those made at any other depot. However, if you were in any way developed or individualised as a civilian it was a stiff process, being wrought into shape and standardised to type.

I suppose the British nation coming to the barrack-gates did exhibit an extraordinary diversity, a divergency from type that in the long run must have somewhat disgusted the sergeant-instructors, and they must have been pretty well “ fed up ” with the British people before they had been long at their task. I was such an undisciplined person that I felt I owed the army

some apology for myself. Still, the fact of enlistment is the surrender of an individual to the army ; the individual has surrendered and the army has to make the best of him. He has offered his body and soul and will and mind as so much raw material—the responsibility is not his, however much he may be sworn at in days to come.

An immense gulf seems to separate the man who wrote from the man who shoulders the rifle. It is as if he had died, as if I who write had once been he and died, and then been born again as a soldier. When for the first time after many months I took up the pen again and tried to write, I felt that even my hands had changed. For at Little Sparta you never touch the rifle with your hand in any action of the drill but you strike it. The squad stands with blood streaming from fingers and palms, and the instructor yells for "noise, more noise—ye're afraid of hitting it." So with rough swollen hands I sit now and try to think and write as of yore, whilst my mind in a gloomy mood seems waiting rather for orders.

My last day in civilian life was calm. I believed that the suppression of my thought in a material way would cause it to shine forth more strongly by and by. What I dreaded most was the taking away of the marks of individuality. For I knew well that the army hated all distinguishing marks except its own stripes and stars and crowns and patches, and that the general

appearance of the ordinary civilian was always somewhat more or less of an offence to a good soldier. I used to think that in the drab, dull way of the modern tailor every one was really in uniform even in peace-time—the bowler hat, the dark clothes, the stick, the newspaper in hand, this was the livery of the commercial service, and I rebelled. I wore my distinguishing marks. However, it soon became clear that the army was the straiter sect. When I came to Little Sparta the whole army seemed to glare at me, as uniformity stares at diversity and discipline at freedom

I was a day in civilian attire, and then the process set in : change of clothes, of boots, hair off, buttons polished. The “trained sweat”¹ who cut my hair said it seemed like murder to him, but I’d be hanged if the sergeant-major saw how long it was. I scrubbed floors and tables, blackleaded the grates, shined the everlasting ration-tins. I went out with the scavenging cart and picked up leaves and paper ; I was on cook-house fatigue, sergeants’-mess fatigue, washed out the floors of the canteens, on sewage fatigue, I with a scoop ten feet long, a companion, also a new recruit, with a large muck-holder. And, “Daddy,” said he facetiously, “what did you do in the Great War ?”

A new squad was in formation, and we were set all manner of fatigues. In the midst of these the reality of civilian life seemed to be

¹ *Trained sweat*, slang name for the barrack-room old soldier who trains raw recruits in “cleanliness.”

slipping back and receding like shifting sands under the feet. There were twenty or thirty of us, and we none of us felt sure of ourselves as soldiers, and I had misgivings that I should never correspond to type. Worse doubts were to come when appearing on parade-ground in the new squad to drill. Mere change of dress does not change a man. Originality and individual expression shone through my uniform, and was at odds with it, so that I looked as if I had just put on a friend's uniform or exchanged clothes with him for a joke. Several others in the same squad were more or less in the same case as I. But I think that for the first week no one came to our squad to drill it or inspect it but his eyes lighted on me particularly, and he asked with some querulousness, "*Who is that man?*" Temporary lance-corporals seemed to have power of life and death over us, and thought out ever more dreadful oaths and vulgar epithets as we came daily under their notice.

An oldish fellow, who had broken down under the severe training, and was now held, against all conscience, as an employed man, a tailor, instead of being returned to his family in Perth, warned several of us not to take what was said to us to heart. "The great process of bullying and intimidation has set in," said he. "They try and break you at the beginning and take all your pride out of you. But it'll be better later on. Never answer any of them back or get angry. It's not worth it."

Another man also gave us excellent advice.

"Never catch the sergeant's eye," said he.
"The sergeants hate being looked at."

The officers had very little to do with us in the initial stages of training. A very great personage to us was the brigade sergeant-major, with the royal arms embroidered on his sleeve. He was kind to the recruits but a terror to the non-commissioned officers. His sharp eye often detected a corporal or sergeant in the act of striking the men. He seemed to regard it as one of the worst offences possible, and he never failed to administer a sharp reprimand to an offender. The men had no greater grievance than that of being struck whilst on parade, and it made the blood boil to be struck oneself or to see men near forty years of age struck by corporals or sergeants of twenty-three or twenty-four without the possibility of striking back. The sergeant-major also tried to stop the more exuberantly filthy language that was used, but in that he was much less feared by the instructors. Even when he was near them, the latter had a way of standing quite close to you and delivering a whispered imprecatory address on adultery, the birth of Jesus, the sins of Sodom, and what not. The instructors, who had a very free hand whilst "knocking civvies into shape," said the sort of things which every man instinctively feels can only be answered by blows. Descriptive justice can never be done to this theme, so important in itself, this particular aspect of the training.

For although there is a French book in which such obscenity as is used has been set down as heard, it is not really possible in English. It is not even desirable, except for one reason—that reason being the assumption that bad language, the “hard swearing,” is only a trait of which we may be indulgently proud, a few bloodies and damns, and that’s all. It is much more than that, and it is frantically disgusting and terrible. It could not be helped in the middle of a great war, and no one naturally would find fault with the old peace-time professional army, whatever language it found most convenient, but it is different when the whole nation is brought under the military yoke. If conscription is going to survive, let us remind all private soldiers who have come through the obscenity and detested it all the while, lest as fathers of the rising generation they should regard it in a more lenient spirit, and think it harmless for their sons when at eighteen or nineteen they leave the purer atmosphere of home or school or factory or office for the training-ground. Army life has many compensations, but there are thousands of quiet youths in every generation who would be corrupted and spoiled by the sort of treatment received during the Great War. And among these quiet youths would be found most of the really gifted and promising. The army is an institution somewhat like a public school, in that each fresh generation going into it inherits the undying part of the language and manners of those who have

gone before. The old controls the new, and it is impossible to escape traditions which, besides being manifest and glorious, are often secret and evil as well. It is impossible to make a fresh start and train the young nation in a completely wholesome, positive, and ideal atmosphere. It seems strange, however, that "the red little, dead little army" should now set the way of life and expression for the whole nation in arms, and that we should all have gone through such a miserable eye of a needle. But at the moment when practically all have been brought in, it is possible to look around and see that the whole system is staffed by the survivors of the pre-1914 army. They have made the tone. The hope is that if military service comes in as a national feature of our life after the war we shall purify the system and make the army a decent continuation school, where a young man can grow nobly to manhood among his fellows.

As a squad we were nominally in charge of one very young corporal, but as there were many supernumerary instructors on the parade-ground, there were many sergeants and corporals who tried their arts upon us, and we were drilled day by day not by one but by ten or twelve non-commissioned officers. For convenience I give them numbers, though they had no numbers really, and the numbers have no reference to their seniority or to any other facts of their military life.

Sergeant One ("Ginger") was somewhat of an old man on the barrack square. He was not

so supple as he had been : his limbs and form had set long since—set in a curious regimental, wooden way. He was senior sergeant and instructor, but it was necessary for him, as for other instructors, to show recruits how the drill ought to be done. He did the drill in front of us like a wooden-jointed soldier working on strings—his body had set to the type of the toy soldier—wooden, regimental, jerky, correct. He did not, I believe, turn out such good squads of recruits as some of the younger instructors. This was perhaps due to lack of youth and enthusiasm. When alone he could upon occasion be heard talking to himself, giving drill orders and making imaginary ranks of men form fours. Rather an amusing figure in his way, he ought to have risen long since to the rank of sergeant-major, but could never master vulgar fractions, and his long multiplication sums were generally wrong. He had a natural malice against educated men, and was never tired of saying that it did not take a college education to do this or do that. He was the most illiterate of the sergeants, had difficulty in explaining himself in words, and could often be heard saying in his jaunty voice : “ Nah, I don’t want you to do one of them theres, I want you to do one of them theres.” When an officer came near he would coo at us like a dove, and be so vulgarly persuasive that we would grin, so patient and laboriously illustrative that he must have been thinking that he would be put down for promotion at last. He felt he knew how to manage officers. As

soon, however, as the officer would be out of hearing he would blast and damn to make up for his patience. He was capable of frantic fits of anger, when he would use indescribable language, and threaten to strike right and left. He was always going to "bash your silly head in." When he had us away from the barracks, on a field expedition where no one of higher rank was near to hear, he displayed the temperament of a madman. He certainly gave one the impression of having a mad streak in him, racing us far and wide over the mud, cursing and blinding like some old woman given to drink. We also formed the impression that he taught some parts of the drill incorrectly. When other non-commissioned officers pointed out mistakes that we were making he would say, "The Captain 'll never fluff," and that was enough for him.

Sergeant No. 2 was a fierce, lean Edinburgh lad, who had been at the battle of Loos and been wounded. He had the dour tone of his regiment developed *par excellence*. His whole idea in drilling and training was terror, and he seemed to get strange pleasure from giving all manner of people the shock of their lives, bursting suddenly upon them in military rage. He would be dressed before reveille, and be waiting at our door for the first sound of the bugle, to dash in and pull down half the collapsible beds in the room, screeching at us as if the enemy had arrived. He struck his rifle so violently in the drill that his hand was always bleeding, never looked any one fair in the face,

but growled and snarled in his curious Scottish tone. He was a good instructor, but off parade he was known as the bun sergeant, owing to his proclivity for sharing men's parcels from home. One day when some one had bought a pot of jam he came into the room and said to another recruit, "Here, you, take that up to my bunk, will you?" And the jam was gone. He was reputed to have married a Salvation Army girl, and he neither drank nor swore, but he made a meal of conscientious objectors every day, prided himself on having chased some leader of an anti-conscription league round and round the drill square till he dropped in a faint. He would never take a German prisoner, and in general he was a thoroughgoing old army type.

He had a natural prejudice in favour of men hailing north of the Tweed, and if he found fault with a man in the squad he would ask :

"Where do ye come from?"

"Inverness," the recruit would perhaps reply.

"Don't tell that to me," he would blurt out in gutturals, but he would find no more fault with that recruit. If the luckless wight had answered "Liverpool" or "Tooting" or "Maidstone," the sergeant would tell him he'd got to "brighten his ideas up" and lead him a dog's life. He had a tremendous prejudice in favour of the "Jocks," and was never tired of twitting our brother regiment of England—the "Bill-Browns," who, he averred, "left us in the lurch at Loos." When he found out that I had been born in his own city he discovered no fault in me,

but took a larger share in any parcels sent me. One evening he called me to his bunk and said, "Ye were a writer or something in civil life, weren't ye? Ah well, and this life doesn't suit me either, I can tell ye. I wasn't meant to be a soldier. Just take my bike and clean it, will ye?"

Sergeant No. 3 was the humorous sergeant, a Whitechapel cockney, very fond of beer, and possessing an endless flow of humorous remarks. By the smartness of his salutes he often startled the officers. He did everything in an exaggerated way, and exhibited a whole series of idiosyncrasies and funniosities. Though a most excellent drill-instructor, a regular "Sergeant Whatshisname" who could drill a black man white, he was illiterate and unskilled and would not have made a decent living outside the army. They say that if a cockney gets into a Highland regiment he makes the best soldier of all. In Sergeant No. 3 the humour, the self-conceit, the natural cleverness and whimsicality of the coster ran riot. He had been turning out squads of soldiers as fast as they could be trained ever since August 1914, had not been interfered with by officers, and had developed a high degree of crankiness. His forte was "about turn and double march," and he broke men in by the most violent exercise. He could make us go faster and faster by accelerating his left-rights till our march was a dizzy madness, and he delighted in giving about turns following directly upon one another, so that the barrack walls spun past us. We streamed sweat, our hearts thumped,

our wind went, we fell out and were rushed in again, and all the time the sergeant followed us with imprecations and jokes and commands. He was one of the most successful sergeants on the square and, despite his ways, he was very popular.

Sergeant No. 4 was a dark young fellow with a bushy black moustache and a most violent voice. To him we were always ruptured ducks or ruptured crows. He was a most successful drill-instructor. He was not so original as the rest, but felt it necessary to be funny. This he achieved by scaring the timid recruits. He had absorbed all the brutality of the soldiers' profession, and thought that brutality was humour.

Sergeant No. 5 was a genial ex-policeman given to drink.

Sergeant No. 6 was a quiet, careful sergeant who used no bad language, and of whom the men said with real appreciation, "He's a gentleman." He had the name of turning out very good squads.

Sergeant No. 7 was a boxer, who was also kind. He told us he had once been a religious man but the war had caused him to swear and to kill without an idea of mercy. He gave us, as it were, long P.S.A. talks punctuated by bayonet drill.

Sergeant No. 8, a bayonet-instructor of a brutal cast of intelligence, seemed by his conversation to be sexually mad. He would commonly say to massed squads when they had made a mistake :

"Wait for it, can't yer? Yer mother had to wait for you before you were born."

Most of his observations were of this kind, and his favourite way of bullying his men was by making indecent inquiries. It was very tedious, and made the drudgery of becoming a soldier rather worse.

Corporal 9 was a bayonet-instructor, a Welshman, who talked a great deal to us on the ethics of killing Germans. A very good fellow in his way, clean-mouthed, the right type, and similar to Sergeant 7.

Corporal 10, who took us a great deal, was young, stupid, foul, given to striking the men, a poor instructor, and very unpopular.

There were others, of course, but they had less to do with us, and the details of these probably give some notion of our masters.

The men who were coming in to be trained were those destined to fill the gaps in the army in the late winter and spring of 1918. They proved themselves in course of time to be as firm and brave and as effective as any that had gone before. It is even probable that the ordeal they were destined to stand in France and Belgium was the greatest of the war. In them Little Sparta was justified even more than in the others.

We were rather the last hundred thousand, the gleanings of British manhood. Not that we had come literally to the last hundred thousand recruits. The forty-to-fifty-years-of-age men

had yet to be called up. But we were mostly "hard cases" of one kind or another, and there were a considerable number who would ordinarily have been considered unfit for our Spartan regiment even when recruits were scarce. Some also in a true and sensible national economy ought never to have been sent to fight.

My barrack-room neighbour on one side is a sturdy lead-puddler from Newcastle, nicknamed Wilkie Bard by Sergeant Three. He is a man with a mighty arm earning five or six pounds a week lifting huge weights of molten lead. He has his own wee house in one of those jaded Newcastle suburbs, which when walking through I have thought must be wretched to live in. But his wife and four children are there, and he is proud that he has never had a half house but always a whole house to himself. He enlisted the same day as I, and he looked so miserable that I tried to cheer him up. "Eh, man, but I do feel bad," said he. He has spent many a quarter of an hour telling me domestic details of his home in his broad tongue. The one on the other side is Songster, as some have called him, and he also is married and has four children ; he nears forty, and has a daughter of seventeen. He has been taken from "the gas and brake department" of a northern railway—poor old Songster, the scapegoat of the squad. Further on in the room is Sandling Junction, a man who came from east of Kent instead of north of Forth, and suffered accordingly. He had a neck like a tram horse, and I remember one day Sergeant No. 8

got hold of it with both hands and squeezed it till his eyes dilated. He looked rather obstinate and dull, though I think he was only a characteristic south of England peasant. He was pointed out to the jocose Sergeant Three one day. The two stood facing one another, making a very comic couple. Then suddenly the sergeant seemed to brighten up with an idea. "Oh, Sandling," said he, "fetch me my entrenching tool—and some flowers." The sergeant implied that if he drilled him long a grave and a wreath would become necessary.

We have also in the room B—, a well-known musical composer, rather an angel, and certainly of a very charming personality and a temperament unsuited to army life. The training was knocking all music out of him, his hands were like a navvy's, and when he had to go to Queen's Hall to hear one of his pieces performed, he had a nightmare with his fingers worse than that of Lady Macbeth. "The first thing people will notice when I come forward will be my dreadful hands," said he. But he worked hard at the drill. Sergeant Five, who had charge of him, was very kind. I don't think, however, any one realised the strain and torture of the mind in a man whose heart and soul is given to Art, given long since, and the mind and body suddenly given to the army. I watched it lay this man prostrate. Suddenly he was taken to the hospital, and he lay there in a wretched state for weeks. When he came out he was excused all drills and military exercises, but instead was put to do dirty domestic

work. He was most conscientious, and used to sit in a corner of the barracks with the appalling ration-tins in a cloud of bath-brick dust, and he would scour, scour, scour for hours on end. Watching him one day when he was doing something else, I suddenly saw that his face no longer expressed music but reflected ration-tins ; it was ration-tins all over—a most appalling physical expression. Even so, however, polishing ration-tins was better for him than the parade-ground, and he visibly relaxed and was always making jokes, sloping and presenting arms with the barrack-room broom and imitating the drill. In the army everything is done *by numbers*. On the command *One* you do this, on the command *Two* you do that, and B— coined the delicious phrases, “Winning the war by numbers” and “How to win the war by numbers.” It was a stock type of jest by him. One morning after bugle-call he called out from his bed, which was opposite mine, “Look, how to get up by numbers ! On the command *One* you throw the blanket half-way down ; on the command *Two* you sit up in bed ; on the command *Three* you make a half-right turn ; on the command *Four* bring the right leg out, on *Five* the left.”

“Oh,” said I. “As you were ! Not half sharp enough ! Too much of the old man about it !” which was rather cruel, but dear B— got a real “As you were !” from the army later on, and for his low nervous state was returned to his musical avocation. Blessed day when he

looked last at Little Sparta ! But, as I said, artists belong to an almost impossible class.

B——'s chief friend was commonly called Bernard, a famous vocalist, whose voice had ravished the ears of the worshippers in fashionable London churches many a time and oft. I think he was by far the cleverest man I met in the ranks, and at the same time he was extraordinarily kind to his fellow-soldiers, and was ready to take endless pains to save them from punishment. He never got into trouble himself, being very smart, and having an aptitude for seeing the quick and effective way of doing things. "Everything in Little Sparta depends on time," he told me. "You are hustled from the moment you get up till the end of the day, and unless you learn the tricks you are bound to get into trouble." I think he "worked his ticket," as the saying is. About his ninth week he began to complain of headaches, and was "decategorized" by the medical authorities on the ground of neurasthenia.

I heard a curious story of a violoncellist who was said to have come to Sparta with long hair and beautiful white hands, and he would not cut his hair nor soil his hands, and kept both inviolate till, in despair, the authorities handed him over to a regimental band. He was very rich, and no matter how often he was awarded punishment he never did an extra drill.

My comrades included also ten American volunteers, several of whom I got to know pretty well. There had been a rush of American volunteers to our colours in the summer. America

was coming into the war, and these volunteers were the first-fruits of President Wilson's great decision. It may seem perhaps rather strange later on that there should have been Americans enlisted in the British Army. But this was how it came about. America always contains a great number of unassimilated immigrants who, while taking their stand as "good Americans," are not actually and legally nationalised, and retain their original European nationality. Every nation in Europe, to use the conscriptive term, possessed large numbers of "nationals" in America—Britain perhaps most of all. So when America decided to take active part in the war she ceased automatically to afford refuge to those European young men who did not want to fight for their respective countries. An Englishman in America had to choose between being taken for the American Army or joining the British. A great number of British thereupon volunteered for immediate enlistment in the British Army. Evidently, however, no objection was made to ardent U.S. boys who, in the incipient war fever, wanted to get ahead and be in Europe first. Thus large contingents of British immigrants and actual Americans came over to England to enlist. They had a great reception, as some who were in London at the time may remember, marched through the streets, were given a welcoming feast and made much fuss of. Great Britain was very grateful for these young men, an earnest as they were of what was coming later from the United States. Each of these volunteers had

the choice of what regiment he would join, and questions of height or chest measurement generally were waived. If one said he'd go to the "Black Watch," to the "Black Watch" he went. If another fancied the "Coalies," he was forwarded right away. In this way our regiment of "Jocks" got ten, which was one-third of the squad in which I drilled.

There was "Red," a clever and observant boy—only nineteen years old—from New York, always getting punished for smiling and for being a "God-damned Yank." He was thought to be an orphan, or rather a waif, with no relatives or friends, for no letters ever came to him, nor was he interested in the post as others were, nor did he write letters. I believe he belonged to an unhappy home and had run away. He had been brought up and educated in a monastic institution where, by his account, a most inhuman discipline had prevailed. He had escaped from it as from hell and gone to New York to earn a living by any means that came to his hand. He was quick-witted, and was earning a living composing pithy paragraphs in advertisement of hotels and country resorts when he heard the call of the army. He had had no idea he was entering himself in a new system of discipline perhaps harder than that of the monks, and he was impressed with his own ill-luck—thinking he must be destined to be killed in France. Then there was ambitious Fitz from Virginia, a thoroughgoing Southerner, sincerely sighing for "Alabama, Tennessee, or Caroline,

anywhere beneath that 'Mason-Dixon' line.' He was only twenty years of age, an engineer in civil life earning a good living. He was full of exuberance and music. The British sergeants and corporals couldn't understand his speech, but he didn't care, and was for ever humming coon songs to himself. I knew him very well, and his favourite song was the nigger mother's reply to her little girl who wept because she was not white—"You'd better dry your eyes, my little coal-black Rose." He joined the British Army because he thought it likely to be better than the American one, and he wanted to belong to something "first-class." He watched the Black Watch drilling and watched us, and came to the conclusion we drilled better, so he joined the "Jocks." He also wanted to get to France and do heroic deeds, win the war by himself, as it were, before other Americans could get to it. His desire was always to be first in everything. He had a passion for style in drill, and was far and away the best man in the squad. Then there was a clever and loquacious actor from St. Louis, who had played *Hamlet* in many towns of America. He was ready to instruct even his instructors. He could impart to his voice several tones, and when you thought he had finished talking and your turn had come, he would suddenly flow on in a new key. His gift of the gab baffled the sergeants, and I remember all one of the most terrible could say to him was that he ought to fix a horn to his head and he'd make a dam good gramophone. He should have

stayed and got a commission in the American Army ; his constitution was unsuited to the life of a private at Little Sparta and in the trenches. However, he stuck it well and made an excellent little soldier. Then there was H—, a smart youth, who told me life had been heaven in New York, dancing every night and sleeping most of the day, and he never thought he was coming to such drudgery as Little Sparta life. He had enlisted and come over to England merely to "charge with the Guards." He told me "the Guards never turn back," and he longed for the front. There was "Gurt," a substantial, bald, industrious, teetotal butler from New York, a simple Christian of Y.M.C.A. type. He made a good soldier, but was killed soon after he got to the front ; and there was "Will," a conscientious and rather noble fellow of forty from the Far West who felt that Germany had to be faced, and that it had been "up to him" to go—one of our best shots and most dependable men, destined, however, to be badly gassed on his first day in the line and to be killed later on.

There was tall Willie, an excitable Scottish gamekeeper who suffered from rupture, but was nevertheless graded as "A." He came to us pale and broken, but put on health in a remarkable way and became a very redoubtable bayonet-fighter. He was, however, terribly nervous, and was very much baited by N.C.O.'s who loved to see him getting more and more agitated. Sometimes every one in the field would be watching him doing Swedish drill and making frantic

convolutions through sheer nervousness, but I have always marked him down as the type that gets the V.C. at the front. He was, moreover, the most industrious cleaner of his equipment in the barracks, and he never once went out at the gate for a walk whilst he was at Little Sparta, and could always be found in the evenings sitting in the barrack-room.

“Now, what was you in civil life?” said Sergeant Four to him one day. He had been bullying him verbally for some time.

“Rrr obbit cotcher,” said poor William, to the intense mirth of the sergeant.

“Oh, that explains why you’re always bobbing and grabbing at something with your hand,” said he.

There was S——, the nephew of a peer, and he slept next me at one time, and found a common ground in the fact that we both knew certain famous actors. His speciality, however, was not the stage ; he was an excellent accountant and a practical financial expert. He ought not to have been in the army, and eventually suffered with shingles and was employed as a clerk. I think he ought to have been given his freedom.

Joe was another comrade, the hardest and, some said, the stupidest, some the craftiest man who had ever come to Little Sparta to be trained. He had the face and head of a mediaeval anchoress. He swore frightfully, but from the look of his face there must have been a capacity for piety in him. But he never did anything right on the square, and his punishments were

terrible. He made such mistakes that one would have said he must be mad, and he couldn't be laughed into being any wiser. He was a brewer's labourer from the Birmingham district. However, he made good and was sent to the trenches at last. Some thought he was "working his ticket" like the man who, whenever he saw a bit of paper on the ground, ran and picked it up and gave it to the sergeant, even though a field-marshall were inspecting the troops at the time. But I think Joe was honestly silly. When he got to France he did not put any address on the top of his letters, and explained that his wife did not know he had been sent to the front and he didn't want her to be upset. The motive, as the journalese-writer would say, "was entirely to his credit." But the simplicity of it was characteristic of his ways.

What a lot of punishment Joe saved the other men by taking the sergeants' ire away from them to himself ! He was the most talked-of man I came across in the army, and his name had only to be mentioned to N.C.O.'s and it banished all other topics, for he fairly baffled them. I think one side of the Anglo-Saxon race was revealed in Joe. He was an absolute type, and through him much that is difficult in the character of our public men could be explained.

"Jerry" was another original. His peculiarity was loud singing. He sang all day like massed barrel-organs, or, as Gorky said of Shakro the tramp, as if he were having his throat cut. And some of the songs were of the re-

cherché obscene. I have never come across such bestiality in any language, screeds about niggers in brothels and incest that might make a devil's hair erect. He was at the same time a good-natured mother's darling, confessed to me that he loved his mother more than any one else in the world. He came from Liverpool, and was an ex-policeman. After puzzling over him for some time, I said, "Were you ever on duty in music-halls?" "Yes, often," said he. I think that probably he picked up those songs before and after the performances and round about the dressing-rooms. He thought them clever and amusing. It was very trying, however, for us to listen to him.

Then there was a charming broken-down old sailor, a ne'er-do-well, wrecked with drink, who had nevertheless a mellow Scottish accent and a sense of the humorous which would have made his fortune on the stage. He was killed when he was sent to France, and the voice which had amused so many became silent.

There was another Liverpool Scotsman, who used bad language like a machine-gun. He had the most filthy imagination as to what our food might in reality be, and spoilt many a queer-looking dish by apostrophising it in Liverpoolese. He was one of our worst characters, and soon got a job on the military police.

We had a giant from Lerwick, six feet five inches, and he was nicknamed Figure One. We had a tall massive farmer from Inverness-shire, fed not only by the rations but from his own

farm. His Scotch was very broad and it was difficult to understand him.

The best men that we had were from the Western Highlands of Scotland and the Isles. Some of these spoke English only with difficulty, and they were bullied a good deal by the drill-sergeants, but they were of a gentle kind, calm, strong, and serene. It was always pleasant to talk with them, for they were without a trace of the vulgarity which nowadays seems to have entered the grain of all our working-people. There were, however, many other quiet Scots and English, though it is impossible to mention them here. The tone was given by the noisy people.

There is one atmosphere of the barrack-square and another of the barrack-room ; the one all tension, the other all relaxation. At first I preferred the latter, but later I prefer the former. On the parade-ground we are all silent, we are strung-up and intense. We wait in a throbbing expectation for the word of command or the drum-beat that means *Eyes front*, and wait so intently that frequently we are nervously betrayed into "beating" it and fulfilling the order before the order has been given. We strive with all our nerves not to make a mistake, and as we strive we listen to a constant flow of violent language and threats. In the barrack-room, however, we seem to care for nobody. We let ourselves go. At least the others do. I

obtain my relaxation differently. But in most of the others it shows itself in an abandonment of restraint. In cases where self-respect has been sapped on the parade-ground its weakness is quickly apparent in talk. Nearly every one plumps down on to an animal level. Even religiously minded and apparently delicate men allow themselves to talk indecently and to swear and make mean jokes and commit improprieties. It is only shallow and vociferous small-talk, but it is all the same unworthy of human beings, and there is no indication for the naturalist that we are higher than pigs, yea, dogs, jackasses, sailors' parrots.

We do not sing well. Our regiment is supposed to shout, and if a man speaks in a sing-song voice he will be told that he ought to have joined the Taffies. Tall Willie whistles lugubriously bagpipe airs ; Jerry sings like massed barrel-organs. But every one is infected with American airs, and whimper now and then that :

At the table
Next to Mabel,
There's an empty chair.

Many hymns are parodied. "Holy, Holy, Holy!" becomes "Grousing, grousing, grousing!" Favourite parodies are :

When this wicked war is over
No more soldiering for me,

to the tune of a favourite Y.M.C.A. hymn,

“ What a friend we have in Jesus ! ” And we frequently hear :

Old soldiers never die, never die,
They rot away.

The last hour before bed-time is the most clamorous. There is shouting and swearing and acrobatics, whilst all the most assiduous are equipment-polishing, rifle-oiling, trouser-pressing. In the midst of all this I am rather like one in a dream, but I cannot help smiling at a lusty coster near by who all the while he is cleaning his buttons keeps bawling in a staccato barrow voice :

“ Tuppence a pound plums. Syme pryce figs.”

He had sold them in civil life.

Night passes, and the morning-bugles break out in the darkness and stillness—far away and doubtfully at first, then close at hand, urgently and unmistakably. We draw on the warm pressed trousers on which we've been sleeping, put on boots and puttees, fold our blankets in the correct way, scrub the floor under and about the beds, wash and shave, draw our ration of bread. There are crowds who are shaving, trying to glimpse bits of their faces by flickering gaslight in the tiny looking-glasses. Other crowds are swilling the stone stairs and passages with water, and sweeping them clean with heavy brooms. Other crowds are at the cook-house, waiting to bring in the breakfast ration-tins.

There is a plentiful breakfast at seven, and then general swabbing till eight—the first parade at eight-thirty. The barrack-square becomes an inferno of drill orders, and stamping, rushing, yelling—a tumult which is almost indescribable. A long-haired Slavonic friend came down one day to meet me after barracks, and chanced to come whilst the drill was in progress. It almost blighted his happiness. He could not see it, he could only hear it, and as he described the sound, “ ‘Twas like hobgoblins striving against one another in hell.” We who were in the midst of it were appalled and cowed till we got used to it. Some notion of a first parade with Sergeant Three may be gleaned from the following :

“ Who the — is this man ? Where did this new recruit spring from ? Take him away and drown him ! Take him round the back and pull the string. Hold him, hold him. He’s drunk. Do you drink ? That’s what’s the matter with half you new recruits, you don’t drink enough. You haven’t got balance, and you’re always falling over. Now then, left turn, right turn, about turn, breaking into quick march, quick march ; about turn, about turn, left turn, halt—I say, what were you in civil life ? A writer ? Bloomin’ fine writer, I bet. A writer, hff. On that scale I’d be king of England. You don’t know right from your left. Quick march ! You’re rolling your body about like a tank. You’ve got no control of yourself. About turn, about turn, about turn. You’ll fall down in a minute and I shan’t pick you up. Come on, the

writer ! You see that house over there ? That's the spud-hole, my bonnie lad, and there you'll go. No, it's not the Hotel Cecil. *Keep yrrr eyes to the front, will yrrrrr !* You'll get your dinner presently. And it won't be fried fish from a silver plate and a French waiter, but three-quarters of a pound of meat, *including fat and bone*, and lucky to get it ! The whole lot of you look like ruptured vultures or a herd of mad horses. Halt ! Stand at ease ! ”

The recruit does not know the Little Sparta way of standing at ease, which is a movement and gesture suggestive of defiance and a determination never to budge from the ground whereon you stand.

The sergeant in mock solemnity explains.

“ Do you understand now ? ” he asks.

“ I hope so,” the recruit replies.

“ You wha-at ? ” he screeches.

“ I think so,” corrects the other, realising that one must not hope.

“ Who are you talking to ? ”

“ The sergeant.”

“ Have you got a mother living ? ”

“ Yes, sergeant.”

“ What would she say if she could see you now ? ”

“ I don't know, sergeant.”

“ What's the first duty of a soldier ? ”

“ I don't know, sergeant.”

“ Obedience. What is it ? ”

“ Obedience, sergeant.”

“ Well, mind you do. Take that smile off

your dial. If you laugh I'll run you to the guard-room. You're in the army now. Not in the Cork militia. No use you're coming here and trying your hand on. I'll break yer. I'll break yer blooming heart, I will. I've seen plenty of your sort come in at that gate. I'm not afraid of you, big as you are. Not of twenty like you rolled into one."

He was not afraid because he had the army behind him, and it was no use saying a word in reply. Some weeks later a Canadian backwoodsman was brought straight from his native haunts to this barracks and was addressed in the same way. He flared up, and replied, "You can speak like that to Britishers if you choose, but you're not going to pass it off on an American. I didn't come four thousand miles to be treated worse nor a dog." And he offered to fight. But the sergeant's course was quite simple. He called for an escort, and the recalcitrant recruit was marched to the guard-room. There the Canadian tore the buttons off his tunic and stamped on them, and fought the sergeant of the guard, and was thrown into a cell. He deserted later, but was recaptured, and now I believe the sergeants have him "eating out of their hands." No, no, when you are in you are in—very much in.

The recruit smiles sweetly, and the sergeant, calculating perhaps on rebellion, turns away with, "Thank God we've got a Navy!" Breaking into slow march, slow march! "Right turn! Your military right, not your civil right. Are

you on our side? Because if you are, turn with the rest. You look as if you were coming home late at night and your wife was waiting for you with a poker. . . ."

Sometimes the parade resolves itself into what may be called the sergeant's school. Instead of doing drill the sergeant tells us facts about the army, and we repeat them after him, or he asks us questions and we answer them, sometimes collectively and sometimes individually.

Sergeant Four has us and is putting us through it.

Sergeant. What is the second duty of a soldier?

All. Cleanliness.

Sergeant. The third?

All. Honesty, sobriety, and self-respect.

Sergeant. How many conduct sheets have you?

All. Two.

Sergeant. What is the brigade motto?

All (vociferously). TRIO JUNCTA IN UNO.

Sergeant. *Trio juncta in uno.* And what does it mean?

All. Three in One.

Sergeant (softly). Three in One and One in Three. And how many regiments are there in the brigade?

All. Five.

Sergeant. Five. Right. And what is the motto of your own regiment?

All (vociferously). *Nemo me impune laass-essit.*

Sergeant. *Nemo me impewn laass-essit.* Right. And what does it mean?

All. Touch me not with impunity.

Sergeant. Touch me not with impunity. And if any one says anything against your regiment what do you do?

All (vociferously). Knock him down.

Sergeant (softly, in a Kiplingesque tone). Remember that. Remember, too—that the brigade is the finest in the British Army, and that your regiment is the finest in the brigade.

On Wednesday and Saturday morning we march to music. It is called "saluting parade" or "swank parade." All the squads of the various regiments go round together, and each instructor wants his squad to shine.

"Make 'em think y're the best squad going round," says Sergeant Three. "Put some blooming swank into it, *happ, happ*. Head up, swing yer canes level, heads up, *happ, happ*." And he blows out his cheeks, bunches his lips, and puts much expression into his knees as he shows us how.

We march to the hum-drum hubbub of a band which is playing American popular songs. One does not wish to respond to the vulgar incentive, but there is no help for it, the ears prick up, the pulse responds. You may feel humiliated to be marching to the tune of "Snooky - ookums," but you liven your step. Some of the heavy recruits, such as the

Inverness-shire farmer, take on a frantic gait under the influence of the music, but we think we must be drilling smartly. Sergeant Two can, however, be heard behind us, as it were, wringing his hands and mumbling despairingly :

“ Ma pair regiment, ma pair regiment.”

On a barrack-room door four verses of Conan Doyle's poem on the Battle of Loos have been copied out :

Up by the Chalk Pit wood,
 Weak from our wounds and our thirst,
 Wanting our sleep and our food,
 After a day and a night.
 God ! shall I ever forget ?
 Beaten and broke in the fight,
 But sticking it, sticking it yet.

Trying to hold the line,
 Fainting and spent and done.
 Always the thud and the whine,
 Always the yell of the Hun,
 Northumberland, Lancaster, York,
 Durham and Somerset
 Fighting alone, worn to the bone,
 But sticking it, sticking it yet.

Never a message of hope,
 Never a word of cheer,
 Fronting “ Hill 70's ” shell-swept slope
 With the dull, dead plain in our rear.
 Always the shriek of the shell,
 Always the roar of its burst,
 Always the torture of Hell,
 As waiting and wincing we cursed
 Our luck, the guns, and the Boche.
 When our corporal shouted “ Stand to ! ”
 And I hear some one cry, “ Clear the front for
 the Guards,”
 And the Guards came through.

We realise that we are expected when we get to the Front, and have hard and splendid work to do, as, for instance, at Bourlon Wood or L'Epinette, to behave as we might on parade on the barrack-square. No matter what sort of man the old soldier or N.C.O. may be, there is a tremendous, and even bullying pride in the regiment. "Man, do ye know what regiment ye belong to?"

"Remember you are Guards."

The whole foundation of army training is said to be obedience, and officers are told that absolute, implicit obedience must be obtained. It can be enjoined by persuasion or enforced by punishment. Disobedience in the field is punishable by death, and the recruit must realise that his superior officer has a life-and-death hold on him. When obedience has been obtained, *esprit de corps* must be inculcated. The first problem seems to be how to get that implicit obedience from men who, it may be, have always been accustomed to consider and discuss or think about a thing before doing it; how to get that obedience from men who, it may be, have been accustomed to have others obey them; and to obtain obedience that is implicit obedience, not abject obedience.

The defects in the Little Sparta system are the humiliation of recruits by words or blows, the use of glaringly indecent language, the possibility of squaring punishments, the use by N.C.O.'s, even by lance-corporals, of recruits

as batmen. I believe these were recognised as defects in peace-time, and some of them had been eradicated, others endured in secret. But in war-time the problem of breaking in those who were never intended by Nature to be soldiers was so difficult that some of these ugly things became useful. Constant humiliation and the use of indecent phrases took down the recruit's pride, and reduced him to a condition when he was amenable to any command. It is impossible not to think less of yourself when a sergeant has bawled before a whole squad, "Well, I think you're about the ugliest thing ever dropped from a woman," or, "Are you married? Fancy a decent woman having children by a man like you."

To be struck, to be threatened, to be called indecent names, to be drilled by yourself in front of a squad in order to make a fool of you, to be commanded to do a tiring exercise and continue doing it whilst the rest of the squad does something else; to have your ear spat into, to be marched across parade-ground under escort, to be falsely accused before an officer and silenced when you try to speak in defence—all these things take down your pride, make you feel small, and in some ways fit you to accept the rôle of cannon-fodder on the battle-ground. A good deal of it could be defended on grounds of usefulness. But of course it doesn't make a Christian army, and it's hell for the poor British soldier.

On the other hand, the keeping of ourselves and the barracks clean has an excellent influence. Little Sparta was cleaner than any home, and the only thing against it was the toil it represented. The Americans wondered why labour-saving appliances were not in use. "This place is a hundred years behind," said Red to me. "They'd never do all this work in the States." And he would have had tiled floors, enamelled ration-tins and plates, American cloth on the tables, no open grates, electric lighting, cloth or bone buttons instead of brass ones, etc. etc. But the extra work of Little Sparta was in reality part of the training. Its fruit was visible in our personal appearance. And we were the smartest soldiers you'd ever see on a street, and could be picked out of a crowd by that alone.

We spend hours every day polishing. The five ration-tins have to be shined with bath-brick. We clean our buttons and hat badge with soldiers' friend four times a day, and bring our boot leather to a high polish the same number. We polish the many brasses of our equipment with "bluebell" or bath-brick; we polish the table ends and the metal of our entrenching tools. We burnish the handles of our bayonets with the burnisher. We polish our dummy cartridges, our oil-bottles, and the weights of our pull-throughs. For kit inspection we polish the backs of our blacking-brushes, clothes, and hair-brushes with "nutto" or "sap." We polish the insteps of the soles of our duplicate pair of boots. The eight metal wash-basins which we never use

we bring to a high lustre with "globe polish," and the backs of our Bibles which we do not read we diligently bring to a polish with "nugget" or "sap." Our knife, fork, and spoon are of the sort that rapidly tarnish, so the smart men never use them, but keep a duplicate set for use at table, which set they generally keep dirty. Many of us also use brushes of our own, and we wear also our own socks and shirts, so that the army kit may be always ready for inspection.

Every night we carefully soap the insides of our trouser-creases, wet the outsides, and we obtain smartness by laying the damp garments on our mattresses and sleeping on them. We carefully fold our tunics in a certain way and no other, and we strap our overcoats on the pegs behind our beds, so that they may show not one slightest crease. We keep rags and dusters and silk dusters, shining the wood of our rifles with them till it glimmers, and gently polishing our hat-bands to a colour matching that of the wood. We scrub our equipment, and then paste khaki blanco on it. We wash our kit-boxes and bath-brick our shelves. Thus it may be understood that if we turn out smart on parade it is not without pain on our part. *Il faut souffrir pour être beau.*

It does not come at all natural to men recruited mostly from grubby industrialism. I spent the summer before entering the army lecturing in the canteens of our munition works, and it was a marvellous contrast, the grubbiness of the

men in the one, the shine and sparkle of the men in the other. There undressed for medical inspection at the same time as I at the dépôt six candidates for our famous brigade. The body of one was coaly black and of another brown. But they soon became relatively white, marched as they were weekly to compulsory hot baths, and inspected by officers to see that they were clean. Nothing is accounted more shameful than to be found dirty, and for the offence such humiliating punishment as being washed by corporals with scrubbing-brushes is meted out.

They come in unshaven and with lank hair, but woe betide the Spartan who turns out badly shaved or without the evidence of a weekly haircut. They are introduced to the tooth-brush, and although it seems taken for granted that metal polish can be applied to buttons with the same brush as the powder to the teeth, the men do certainly apply the latter.

An officer noticed a strange tint in a tooth-brush one day, learned that it was from metal polish, and asked the man with what brush he cleaned his teeth. "Oh, I borrow one, sir," lied the man in alarm. "You what? Oh, you must never do that," said the officer.

The men are lectured on keeping their nails clean. One day I heard the following: "Most of you men are married. I'd be ashamed to sit down to meals with dirty nails. It's such a bad example to your children." None of the men made any comment, but it must have been a new idea to most of them.

But polish does not end with clothes and appearance. The men are expected to walk well. No more slouching and loafing. They must always remember they are Spartans, and are setting an example to the rest of the army. This has to be drilled into them. They have double as much drilling as the rest of the army, and they are drilled in a sharper, smarter way. Our turnings on the march are clean-cut and rapid. We form fours with the precision of a bolt movement. We never touch the rifle in drill but we strike it. We stamp our feet in a staccato when we turn about, and all the time we are cajoled and encouraged and bullied to put "bags of swank into it." Above all things we must salute with style. Twice in lectures officers pointed the moral of the state of things in Russia as being due to the initial folly of not saluting. When at large, and even when in London, we are supposed to give full and careful salute to every officer we pass.

One day the King expressed a wish to inspect us. The squad in which I drilled had by that time become senior, and we had the honour of preparing for him and receiving him. As the ex-sergeant-major said, rejoicing he was himself out of it, "You'll see wind up in the dépôt as never before." So it was ; we had a terrific orgy of polishing, and if His Majesty could only have seen us at work the day before he came he would have felt more impressed than by all the glittering parades and Royal salutes in the world. We were inspected at 2 P.M., at 4 P.M., at 6 P.M.

And finally at 8 P.M. we laid out all our equipment on our beds, and Sergeant One, who was in charge, passed it as perfect. Mine was one of the first he saw, and even he seemed to look at it with awe. "Now you must wrap it up in one of your sheets for the night, so as none of the cold air gets at it before morning," said he. Next day, what a scene ! The officers all going about with drawn swords. All the men drawn up in long ranks, faces tense, bodies breathless, rifles presented and rigid, with the bright bayonets bisecting the tips of our noses. The waiting. The National Anthem, and then the King going by, looking at his soldiers one by one and seeing that they were good. Even the sun seemed to have been getting ready overnight, and to have saved himself from damp air. And the officers in attendance on the King had an expression on their faces which seemed to say : "The Spartans, of course ; always the same. So it was, so 'twill be."

But I could not help remembering we were, nevertheless, civilians in khaki, and we came from home life, most of us from poky homes with no bathrooms, and we must return there by and by if we did not fall in battle. How much of all this *amour propre* shall we carry back ? Shall we hold ourselves erect when we get our "civvy" clothes on ? Shall we at least remember in a practical way that we have been trained at Little Sparta ?

"What do you notice about civilians when you compare their bearing with that of a soldier ?" asked an officer.

"Why, an absence of self-respect more or less," he replies. "He doesn't care sufficiently to dress himself properly."

"What is the third duty of a soldier?" asks Sergeant Four.

"Honesty, sobriety, and self-respect," we reply.

"And what is self-respect?"

"Keeping your buttons bright."

Our smartness increases with very marked rapidity, and it should be remarked that after three months at Little Sparta a standard of smartness is achieved which is not kept up in its entirety at other barracks and at the Front. Squads change from civilians to soldiers before the eyes. If individual recruits don't improve they are harried and baited and given pack-drills, and made to do each parade with a pack on the back, put on heavy patrol work at night, thrown into the guard-room on a slight provocation, sworn at, thumped. Then some one will say to them, supposing they complain of feeling unwell, "Why don't you go sick? Go sick and stay sick." That is why Little Sparta has been nicknamed "Kill or Cure." If you "make good" in the squad your treatment will improve somewhat, but if not, it will get worse and worse. The best thing a man could do in the latter case was eventually to go sick, unless he was intent on being a hero and martyr. The medical staff was very good, and, I believe, viewed with

professional disfavour the Spartan process of breaking in civilians. If occasionally men were injured physically or dropped dead on the parade-ground it was no fault of the medical authority, the only fault was the original fault of the requisition that men who were in reality unfit should be graded A, and then the sending such men to Little Sparta. Conditions at the Front itself were less arduous than there.

The story of Songster, our scapegoat, may give an idea of how intolerant Little Sparta was of an ungainly man a little over age and a bit weak.

Songster prefaced many of his remarks with the explanatory phrase, "Being in the gas and brake department." He was employed on a railway, and we all realised that the man who climbs along the tops of railway carriages with a mysterious can in his hand is really a funny type. Songster was the most bullied and the cheeriest man of us all. And he was not merely a new recruit, he remained an impossible one, and permanently took the running fire of abuse off us all. He got into trouble with every one. He stood like an awkwardly tied-up bundle, his puttees were tangled round his legs, his hat unstraight. He was short, and he had a curled red nose and wrinkles about his cheery eyes that made him look like Punch, and he very quickly showed a weakness in one hip that gave him a lurching little limp as he marched. So even a new N.C.O. or strange officer looking at our squad for the first time, picked him out, and would

ask with a tone of annoyance, "Who is that man?"

An officer and the sergeant-in-waiting came in one day at dinner and saw gravy being spilt on the table by one of us. "This gravy," said the officer. "Upon my word, you live like pigs. Who is this man?"

"Songster, sir," was the reply.

"Got him, sir," said the sergeant, writing the name in the book.

And it became a catch question in the barrack-room. We all used to shout out, and not least Songster himself—

"Who is this funny fellow?"

"Songster, sir."

"Got him, sir."

Sergeant Three's favourite expressions for him were "Fred Mayo," "Dosey," and "Basin of death warmed up," or just "Death." "Come on, Death," he used to shout as Songster inevitably took the wrong turning on the march.

After his first day's gruelling of abuse he said to me with a face puckered by emotion, "By gum, I never felt so bad in my life." We were sitting together at a table in the Y.M.C.A. hut, and were writing letters home whilst hymns and exhortations raged over our heads, ever and anon having to stand whilst prayers were made for our souls' salvation. Finally the "sob-raiser," as the Americans called him, made the following appeal :

"Now I've got a lot of little cards here, and I want each of you young men to sign them

before you go out. Just write A.C. on them and your name, and that will be enough. A.C. means 'accepted Christ,' and if any one has accepted Christ this day he'll feel so much happier if he writes it down. Just think what a comfort it will be to your mothers, if any of you die, to know that although you were not a religious sort, you found a Saviour in the army and booked a seat before going West."

"By gum," said Songster, "give me a card."

I thought Songster was going to suffer a great deal. But after three or four days of it he began to cheer up, and became extraordinarily light-hearted.

The most insulting remarks were made to him and about him, and the corporal used to say to us: "This man spoils the squad. If I were you I'd take him round the houses and knock hell out of him, so that he never turned up on parade again." But Songster, though undoubtedly he felt such things, never showed it, and the worse his plight the more exuberant his humorous remarks when he got back to the barrack-room. He outswore every one in the room and told more shocking stories. The men used regularly to look to him for funny stories. One night he told over and over again by request, after lights out, when we were all stretched in our beds, an atrocious story of a woman whose boy was charged with stealing, and she said to the judge, "Punish him, sir, he always were a thief, he were a thief before he were born." "How's that, my good woman, a thief before

he was born. . . ." But truly more funny things were said to him than he himself told.

We were all dressed for our first sentry duty one evening, and Sergeant Three was inspecting our buttons and bayonets. He stood behind Songster and began giving him solemn advice.

"Now, Songster," says he. "If there is an air-raid don't you get mixed up in it. Don't you retaliate."

Punishments were heaped heavy on him. He did an extra pack-drill every night. He was confined to barracks, forced to turn out in full marching order at every parade, and had to answer his name at various hours of the night when the "angels whisper" called him. On Saturdays and Sundays he was detailed for the town patrol.

He was not really fit, and the object of the N.C.O.'s seemed to be to "crock him up" and get his medical category lowered. It was rather a dreadful procedure, and I felt sorry for him, the more so as he was an astonishingly kind neighbour to us all, and was always on the alert to save us from trouble. He used to take a look round at every man's kit every morning and put anything right that was at odds, and of course inevitably he "lost his own name" for his own kit being wrong. He saved me several drills; on the other hand, I gave him advice and made him report sick several times when he thought of still bearing up. As his hip got worse I consoled him with the thought that he would be able to "work his ticket," as the saying is. And he kept in touch with his boss on the rail-

way, for in the event of his category being reduced the railway must apply for him, or else he would remain an odd man about the barracks, doing dirty jobs.

He was our despised and rejected. When I told him I would some time write an account of our life at Little Sparta, he said to me, "I suppose you'll put me in your book—'Songster, sir.'" "Oh, I'm waiting for you to die," I would reply. "One must have a culminating point, you know. Then one can begin, 'The most original fellow in our squad has just dropped down dead,' and tell all about him." And he would grin all over his funny red face, so that it was impossible not to laugh with him.

"You fellows don't grasp Songster," said I. "Because the sergeants speak to him as if he were dirt, and every one laughs at him, you think of him as a negligible quantity. But think of him at home, a respected husband and father, to whom a wife and little ones look up for advice. He has a pretty daughter of seventeen whom some of you might like to marry. He is a taxpayer, a householder, he has a vote, his life is insured, he is a valued servant of the North Eastern Railway."

"But in the army he is just dirt," said several.

Even so.

He told me a good deal of his story. He had been in the green-grocery business, and had also sold coal, had prospered for a while, and then, through no fault of his own, had failed. His business stopped, and he had to cast round

for a job. He was unemployed and owed a lot for rent. His landlady was sorry for him and said he need not pay. Then he got a railway job, and he steadily paid off his arrears of rent, much to the surprise and pleasure of the landlady, who seems to have been a kind woman, for she repeatedly endeavoured to help him. Songster, however, was independent, and liked to fight on by himself. Nevertheless the landlady became his benefactress, and undertook the education of his daughter Lily. Lily wrote long letters to her father, which she signed "Black Devil," and had just got a post as a clerk on the N.E.R., as the father had been taken for the army. She signed herself "Black Devil" because Songster had once called her so in a game, and the nickname remained. His benefactress now lived at Brighton, and he wrote to her now and then. Eventually he felt he'd like to send her a present as a mark of respect, and he hit on the idea of sending one of my books. "If I can tell her the man who sleeps next me in barracks wrote it, it will be very interesting," said he. It much amused me, but we sent my latest book inscribed, and the old lady replied she was pleased to think of him among such nice companions.

As a result of reporting sick so often he was excused bayonet-drill, and was then taken off duties altogether and put in the convalescent squad, which does merely gentle country walks. He was forbidden to do pack-drills, and worked off his punishments in fatigue instead. Although the N.C.O.'s were more and more brutal, the

captain noticed his plight and was kind to him. He refused to punish him any more. Songster dropped out of our squad and floated into calmer waters, being attached to another regiment that wanted a man to make up. At Christmas only two men were to have leave, and I put him up to the best way to get it. The ruse succeeded, and to his great joy his leave paper was signed and he got clear for eight days.

On the last day but one he received a damping letter from his wife saying how little food there was in the house, and how hard it would be to feed an extra mouth. But by the same post Black Devil wrote how pleased she'd be to see her Dad. And on the last day before starting off there came a windfall in the shape of fifty shillings arrears of army pay, and our Songster was chirping for joy all over the barracks, and he bought regimental crests and brooches for all his family. Whilst he was away we "passed out" as a fit and proper squad. Whether Songster will ever "pass out" I know not. But he will never be a true Spartan, though we should love to have him with us just to keep us gay.

"Who is that funny man?"

"Songster, sir."

"Put him in the book."

"He's already in, sir."

"Then put him in again."

If Songster has played his cards well he has got returned to his railway task, though I believe he had a sort of sneaking inclination to go to the Front, and prove that it was an Englishman that

did beget him. If he had been a shirker he could have arranged matters at Little Sparta and got back to civil life. But I don't suppose he would have cared to face his wife and children as an unfit man. Pride intervenes. He has therefore in all probability found his way out to the ditches and the wire and the adventure, and may even have won the D.C.M. before the armistice. It is a notorious fact that the recruits who are most difficult to train often do extremely well when they have to face the real thing.

We had quite a number of "crocks." "Crocks" are always more serviceable than "duds," be it remembered. There was a bank-manager with a hammer toe, who had come all the way from South America to join up. He trained and passed out and did splendidly at the Front. We had at least two ruptured men; one of them wore always an extremely awkward instrument, which he hated to expose at the many medical inspections: both men got to France and were as good as any others.

We had a man who suffered off and on with gastritis, a man who had lost half a thumb, a man whose feet were such a mass of corns that the doctor despaired of his ever doing a drill. And we had men with weak chests, with weak ankles, with weak brains, and lung trouble and rheumatism and neurasthenia. But they nearly all seemed to make good in time, and they filled up the gaps in the heroic line—which illustrates the point that in this war, out of almost any material, first-class soldiers could be made.

I saw a great deal of suffering on the part of these men and these boys ; and it was patiently and quietly borne. It was theirs to bear it and they bore it. Any physical infirmity you might have was bound to make itself felt at Little Sparta. You drilled to the breaking-point, and then you went on drilling. Respite came at night when we took off puttees and boots from swollen legs and feet, and lay down on our wooden beds and slept. What intense sleeping there was in these barrack-rooms ! Men rejoiced that it was evening and that the blessed time was coming. I think for a few minutes after " Lights out ! " the hidden side of men's personalities suffused their brains, the tender bonds with the women they loved asserted themselves, or, if they knew no women, with that sweet *alter ego* that abides in each of us ready to comfort and soothe, and, like God, wipe away the tears from the eyes. The image of the wife behind and the faces of little ones shone in the brain. I suppose few people realise the desperate unhappiness which parting a man from his wife sometimes involves, a silent agony, too, of which men do not care to speak to their comrades.

Most nights it must be said I slept like a dead man, and yet with a waking ear for the voices of the barrack-room. Men become more lovable when they cease swearing and fall like children into Nature's arms in sleep. Again and again some one gives a complaining sigh, or is about to utter a complaining word, but relapses somehow into silence again, comforted. Some one in

delirium jumps up in bed and cries "Halt!" and another cries out, "Oh, oh, where am I, where am I?" The strong man next me from Newcastle is restless too, and I hear him whisper to the unknown, "My poor bairn, my poor bairn, it's awfu'."

A man's first meeting with his wife after being taken for a soldier is one of strange pathos. Pleasure and pain and surprise are mingled, and I think pain is sometimes the most. She has not seen him in uniform before, and it makes a great difference in his appearance. She grasps, even if he does not, that the uniform means that he does not belong to her as before, that he belongs to the King. She may admire him in the conventional way because in uniform he already looks "a hero," but there is always a poignant other feeling beneath. She is robbed. And the man she meets is clearly not the same man as went away from her. Something of his personality has been shorn away from him, something of that which made him lovable to her.

Thus it is. A picquet comes and tells you a lady is at the gate. You know she is coming and are ready to go out. It is perhaps your first time beyond the portal of the barrack-yard. A corporal inspects you to see whether your appearance is worthy of the regiment before he lets you out, and your wife waits whilst some sergeant or other talks to her saucily. However,

out you go hurriedly, silently, and trek from the prison walls with the woman of your heart. It is amazingly difficult to speak. Time is your enemy, for you have only an hour or so before the nightly roll-call. Your wife is dumfounded by your appearance, and you, for your part, walk like a policeman showing some one the way. Rain blows out of a cloud—chilling and soaking you both, and incidentally tarnishing your buttons and brasses. It drives you back from the wooded hills to those mean booths and shops which straggle alongside the barrack-walls and the adjacent grounds of the Lunatic Asylum. In the darkness somewhere there is a coloured sign lit up from within—“Hot Suppers. Now Ready.” It is the inevitable sausage shop. And husband and wife, half-drenched with pelting rain, sit facing one another at a little table, and sausage and mashed is put between. Meanwhile insistent bugle blasts break out from Sparta—the “angels whisper” and the picquet call, and what not, and the woman inevitably starts at the imperious military demand of these brassy calls. Heavy Guardsmen’s feet crash past on the road. And duty calls. You have never loved your wife more, and yet you have nothing to say to her, and somehow you feel distant. You are harder and firmer than you were a week or so ago. Your mind is a blank, and you are waiting for orders, so to speak. The woman, alas, has two miles to walk through storm and rain to a friend’s house, where she is staying the night. And you? You must go. You must say Good-

bye and have done, and return to the gate. And it is a case in which :

Alas, I cannot bless thee, my beloved,
May God bless thee!

And it makes you wish to curse the army, and by the time you reach the barrack-room you are white with voiceless, passionate anger and resentment.

Another great pain which is suffered is in learning to be impure. It is only a strong character that can resist the infection of impurity. Inevitably you say or think things which are obscene and brutal, and many go and do the sort of things they say and think. With what a pang do you relinquish the sacredness of your manhood. You often hear it said in a jocular way : “ What would the missus think if she could hear me now ! ” But oh, the grief in the secret places of the heart when you first begin to swear, when you first say indecent things, when, perchance, in a moment of confraternity a man says an indecent thing about his own wife !

The individual man is better than the army he is in. There are few recruits whose character is worse than the army they enter. And, of course, the reverse is also partly true : no individual is as brave or as patient as the army. I think the splendour of the latter fact dims our eyes to the former. Rightly so, perhaps. But the individual in the army takes the patience

and bravery for granted. He feels more deeply the other. Spiritual suffering and moral defeat cut much deeper than the ordeal in which the nobler instincts triumph.

As the school has a lower moral atmosphere than the homes from which it recruits its children, so the army is lower than civil life. The army (and probably not only our own, but every other army) has a virus of its own. As an institution it is saturated with a disease which it communicates in a greater or lesser degree to all who come into it. How to combat that disease must be one of the problems of democracy, how to reform the institution on a cleaner basis. I know there are many who would say : "Oh, reform it altogether, get rid of it, be as little children and live without it." But that ideal is not likely to be realised soon, and meanwhile it is worth while examining conditions which seem to belong to the past, present, and future of the army alike.

There are also many who would deny that the moral atmosphere of the army is lower than that of civil life, and many who admit the low state, but conceive it to be better and jollier and more desirable than the higher.

Be that as it may, none can deny the real suffering of the conscript when he first begins to use foul language. The pang is repeated when he first gives way to drink, and if he succumbs, as so many inevitably do, to sexual temptation, and if he falls in with the wrong sort of girl. A good soldier, however, can keep

away from drink and lust, though he seldom can escape from impurity of language and thought. Of this he feels the pain, and it is part of the suffering he must endure, but I do not think he has the responsibility. The army itself has that. When he begins to use the army's language without willing it he has ceased to be an individual soldier, and has become *soldiery*.

The best part of the training at Little Sparta was the bayonet-fighting, in which for a moment one did feel some glamour of the barbaric nobility of war. To stand on guard, to make our points and parries and lunges, to charge shouting, to place a foot on the prostrate foe, withdraw the blade and rush forward again, watching and threatening, fearful and yet terrible—all that was training for real fighting, and made the man in khaki one with all who have ever fought a field. Bayonet-fighting is much less brutal than machine-gunnery, gas, shrapnel, liquid-fire, and even bomb-throwing, because it is more personal, and human responsibility is clear.

It is more appalling to be killed by the bayonet because of the psychological terror of suddenly seeing your enemy intent on your death, with fury in his face. It seems more polite on the enemy's part to kill you by machine-gun, but in reality it is only more despicable. A bayonet-fight is an honest, straightforward fight, and we ought to feel less squeamishness about it than about the other.

I heard of a curious case lately. A machine-gunner who was a good Christian was for some reason or other returned to the ordinary ranks when the M.G. division was formed, and he began to do bayonet-fighting under a Guards instructor. In the course of actual warfare it might easily have happened that he should never be in a bayonet-fight, but he must be drilled none the less. And as he listened to the actualities of the drill he was much upset—

“At the stomach point !”

“In, out, on guard !”

“Long point and short point following !”

“At the left nipple and right groin, point ! Cross over ! Jab position ready ! At the throat, jab !”

He began to be greatly troubled by a conscientious doubt that had not crossed his mind in the swaying of the machine-gun. But a bayonet-fighter of crusader-faith is nearer to Christ than a machine-gunner, though both may be far away. The ethics of killing troubled the mind greatly, but these ethics may perhaps be more fitly discussed when treating of religion in the army generally, and in Sparta in particular.

Matters in which we were like and unlike Ancient Sparta.—We were hardly trained, and a man was a fool if he were found out doing wrong. We sat at public tables (we privates),

and whatever our civil degree had been we were equal there. I have read that the inhabitants of ancient Lacedaemon were allowed to jest at these tables—without scurrility. In that we were unlike Spartans, for our jesting was most scurrilous. But we only possessed our wives by stealth, and infrequently, and were punished if we stayed too long. If we felt pain we showed it not, and we masked our faces whatever our grief. We did not have the iron money of the Greeks, but what is the same in effect, we had little, and could not import luxuries. We did not read ; we were enough unto ourselves and despised all others. A Spartan is supposed to have observed when asked to listen to an imitation of a nightingale's song, "No, for I have heard the nightingale itself," which showed that in an intense way the Spartans were not vulgar. We, alas, were excessively vulgar. In much, however, we were like the Spartans, and we were like them in the final thing of all—in battle, where we did not yield. But in much also we were unlike. We did not run in our nakedness, and our eyes were not pure for women. We had not those beautiful Greek bodies, but bodies made ugly with clothes and care. And we had sins, sins, sins upon our brains. We had not the clear intelligence and happiness of the Greek—the innocence of the morning of Europe. The sun was not rising in our souls, but setting through storm and fog. All manner of things could be said about us and against us, but one positive thing redeems the rest. We were proved later

on in the battle-line, and it was seen that we knew how to die, and that it was ever the same humanity that went down in the evening in France and Belgium as went down in the morning at Thermopylae.

III

SOLDIER AND CIVILIAN

ONE of the curious pleasures of being stationed in London is the luxurious leisurely first hour at home when, duty being done, I hasten across the Park to the old familiar rooms where so many pages have been written and so many bright faces seen. Now I cannot entertain friends as of yore, and Time, who was always with me, has become against me. But it is possible to sit in the old arm-chair and look lovingly at familiar panels and the pictures with which I have lived.

Still the luxury is not so much in the time of chair repose as in an inevitable procedure which has become my grace before freedom—the procedure of washing off the barracks. Indeed a taste for living and being which I had not expected expresses itself in the divesting of puttees and the putting off of heavy boots, the peaceful shave in warm water—such a contrast to the hurried shave in the dark with hard cold water at reveille, the washing of close-clipped head so full inwardly of beautiful impressions, yet forced to lie on pillows where dirty heads innumerable have lain before, the warm bath, taking away the poison

of the barrack-room night that clogs into the pores, the seven-times washed fingers which have gone a shabby grey with the dirty work of washing floors and windows, cleaning equipment and rifle, the change into fresh white linen, the dab of eau-de-cologne to cheeks and throat, the few drops of perfume to take away, if possible, the barracks smell. All that belongs to the process of washing away the barracks, putting it away from me, and making me fit to come into the presence of friends.

It is deep ingrained, however. The iron of it has entered the soul. How much there is that cannot be washed away by these means! Dirt has come not only to the body but to the other more precious parts. The language which I use, my own especial language, has got mixed with matter in the wrong place, and the rubbishy phrases and torn and tattered expressions of the barrack-room seem fatally entangled with mine. I speak like a soldier, am coarse like one, have, in fact, a sort of khaki brogue, a dialect as cheap as the stuff we wear, and then I remain inevitably peremptory and brusque in reply. I am annoyed that other people do not come to the point sharply in the soldier's way, and then annoyed at being annoyed—for in my heart I love most of all the leisurely and charming way of talk and action.

There is a second process of washing away the barracks, and that is to sit in my arm-chair gloomy and morose and begin to dream, to dream and melt a little, and then perhaps put forth lazily

an arm and hand that takes a volume of poems from the little shelf by the fire. There is nothing more humanising and sweet to the tired soldier than poetry ; it woos him back again and comforts him, it is the soft hands of the woman he loves caressing him and making him once more precious to himself and her.

The army has enforced a uniform upon the soul itself, a prison uniform, on which is written in cypher : You are nothing and mean nothing, you are no more than dirt ; only the army is great, only the army has worth.

And there is a deep hypnotical effect produced by the great army machine. Moving in its splendour and terror before the eyes it suggests the thought to the heart : You have ceased to be anything or to count for anything in yourself—only the army counts for anything. It suggests it to the heart, and the heart in false sleep accepts it in the army's presence. But when the army is absent the painful process of fighting the illusion begins.

To wash, to dream a little, to read a poem, to be caressed, and then certainly to sleep, to discharge army from the pores for nights and days, for a whole draft leave, for a special leave, for a sick-leave—how long, think you, would it take to get it out of the system ? How long is it going to take for us all ? For by now every one alive has got somewhat of it.

I remember after my first three weeks, when I was virtually a prisoner within barrack walls, and I obtained my first week-end leave and

journeyed twenty miles in Surrey to London on the top of an omnibus, I was mad at the common sights I saw, and drank them in like wine, loved every civilian, grudged no other young man his black attire and precious liberty. I saw the Surrey hills and woods as for the first time sparkling like Eden. It was a most intense hour and a half of joy. Joy and pain also—for the heart ached.

My second week-end was not nearly so intense. My third and fourth were progressively duller, and the 'bus ride was but added boredom, a prolongation of the curse-sodden bricks of the drill-yard. I only ached to know myself becoming duller, less sensitive to sights and sounds, more a possession of the army, more ready to kill and destroy than to be and to enjoy.

A great spell has been wrought over the earth, and even I have succumbed to it. Yes, you also. You and I and all of us. Not only our bodies but our souls are in uniform and cannot get out of it. And it will take longer eventually to demobilise the souls than the bodies. Soldiers from the Front know the programme of the bath: the first bath and what it will do, the second, the third, the tenth; they know the new odours they still exude months after getting home, and the rashes and blotches in the skin—the war which they have taken in being sweated out of them. That is the physical process, and a kindred spiritual one also goes on, the getting war out of the eyes, out of the spirit. Poetry, love, and Nature will perhaps do it at the last;

peace and sleep and the gentle quiet beauty of the unspoiled universe into which we were born. But I know that years and years after peace has been proclaimed we shall be doing what I did to-night before taking up the pen—we shall be washing and purging it away.

Wellington Barracks are only twenty minutes' walk from my home. It might have been my lot to have been sent to any other regiment and to have completed my training in any other part of Britain, but instead I am remarkably and romantically near. I can and indeed *must* lead a double life. Whenever I am free from duty I am free to walk home, and I am called upon to make marvellous quick changes and to re-orient myself spiritually on the shortest notice.

My day's work is coming to an end, the company has been dismissed from bayonet-drill, the barrack-rooms are full of soldiers, and there is a frantic hurly-burly of talk, swearing, singing, and clamorous working. Jerry with the massed-barrel-organ's voice is vocal above all. I am cleaning my boots again, polishing my buttons and hat-badge, rubbing up the brasses of my belt with priceless bath-brick, laying down my bed to be ready for when I shall return, soaping and damping my duplicate trousers, and laying them under the mattress for to-morrow's crease, tidying up. And all the while my ears are passively receptive of all manner of indecent talk, swearing, and brutal or meaningless nonsense

bawled from all sides. But at last I emerge, and with cries of "Good-bye," called after me or called back to them, I make good my escape, pass the scrutinising sergeant at the gate—he will not let you out unless your appearance keeps up the honour of the regiment—and I am enfranchised of that different and fresher air which is the other side of barrack railings, that good air in which civilians luxuriate. A few minutes' quick walking, which is done mechanically, brings me to my own door, and it often seems as if I had arrived instantaneously after passing the barrack gate, so lost have I been in my own set thought. And it is difficult to realise that such a slight difference in time and space separates me from the inferno of the barrack-room.

I have tea. I do my hour of washing off the barracks, dream a little, read a little, and then, it may be, prepare to go out to dinner. I may not wear evening-dress, but there are certain changes to make. Then I go forth to old friends and acquaintances for love and interest, or curiosity and the need to know certain things, as the case may be.

But the contrast between being in a friend's house and being in barracks is even greater than that of home and barracks. And it is more difficult to feel at ease. For one thing, civilian life with its different rhythm comes up against the steady, hard beating of army time. And as I listen to the leisurely way of talk of those who are free, it is inevitable to reflect that they have

all the time in the world, whilst my time is limited and fleeting, and soon, very soon, I must return to the gates. I grudge to friends their sense of time. For indeed the pleasure of their company is most intense—more intense to me than mine is to them, because they have a shallower sense of time. With acquaintances it is easier, though because of the army they seem somewhat more distant and accidental. Their life seems somewhat irrelevant. And they for their part are continually being startled by my uniform and its plainness. I warn them before I come. I am a private in the army and must come in khaki—you don't mind? Not in the least—delighted. Nevertheless I feel strange.

I sat all one evening in the gloomy grandeur of Carlton House Terrace and was entertained by a munition manufacturer who, despite his trade, seemed to nurse ideals and to have been made melancholy by war. We sat after dinner in a sort of ballroom, and a Spanish Count and his wife danced the tango to the strains of a phonograph, and the other guests applauded, whilst the manufacturer with tears in his eyes told me fragments of his soul's tragedy—he was laden with the responsibility of having killed thousands, of having made a fortune through the death of others, and he saw, as all saw at that time, ideals slipping away from the nations, and the ideal cause for which we fought swallowed up in greed, bitter materialism, and hate. And he could not stop the great machines which he had set up. The shells grew ever bigger, the

numbers greater. Yet he felt it was time for peace. He thought that Lloyd George did not treat sufficiently reverently the possible chances as they came along.

We sat and talked, sadly and seriously, whilst the perfect Spaniard made his wife more beautiful and we never seemed to notice them. My time of returning like a Cinderella to dirt and poverty drew nearer, but while aware of the strange contrast, I felt pleasantly peaceful, for somehow the shell-maker had also got something of my sense of time. Before we parted he took me down to the basement of his house, stood me before an immense and terrible-looking chest, and bade me shut my eyes. When I opened them again he had slowly opened the heavy door of the chest, and I saw in front of me a shell eight feet high, and as substantial around as the girth of a tree, apex upward, grey and sinister. "My tragedy," said he. "This is the latest type which I produce."

It was already late. I said good-b'ye. I fled away down the Duke of York's steps and across the mysterious Park, just getting in before the gates were shut. And I entered the erstwhile noisy barrack-room, now dark and stertorian, smelling thickly with an atmosphere that could be cut, and I stepped over the many beds till I came to mine. There I stopped and rapidly undressed, to become one with my comrades again.

I had several invitations to speak in London, which I had to refuse, it being against the army

regulations for a private to appear on a platform in the King's uniform, and also against the regulations that he should appear in civilian attire. I tested the matter and was expressly forbidden. Nevertheless I could not deny myself the pleasure of accepting one invitation, and that was to give an address every Friday in Lent at Christ Church. I found I could get past the regulations by wearing a cassock over my uniform—comprehending the service of Caesar within the ampler service of God. It was to R. J. Campbell that I owed this opportunity and true pleasure. He had read my *Priest of the Ideal*, and would have liked me to be Hampden in his church. So I spoke every week on Christian Idealism, and sought in my new life and experience examples in which life's barren metal ought to be converted into gold.

The contrast again was strange. For Friday is a squalid day in barracks. We use every spare moment to clean our barrack-room, and every one has to take a share down on his knees scrubbing the floor. A huge fire is lit to dry it quickly, every one is angry, and our faces get red, our hands most grubby. There are always shirkers or suspected shirkers. And from an orgy of scrubbing of this kind I would tear myself away, sit down ten minutes to think quietly of my subject, and then, with knees still damp and face and hands still wet, hasten round into Victoria Street to put on the gloomy cassock, walk with clanking steps up the nave, and give my sermon.

It must be said that the better part of such a contrast in living made the worse more bearable. Moreover, it touched a certain sense of the humorous and gave some precious salt of wit.

One night I made one in a joyous party where my neighbour on the one hand was an English princess, and next night I was a sentry at Buckingham Palace. Such a fact might, I suppose, be cited as evidence of the war making us more democratic, but it is not so. War makes us less democratic, and many things which were comparatively easy for me as a civilian were distinctly awkward for me as a private in uniform. Being introduced to officers in a drawing-room was always difficult, and whilst some treated me most cordially, others, with official decorum, remained amusingly cold and distant, and even disinclined to shake hands. In the latter period of the war to be a private soldier was to be of lower social caste, and if a lip-service of honour was paid to the common soldier, there was nevertheless the consciousness that he was without individual power or voice, and was virtually a slave. I had curious adventures in treatment outside of barracks. One night General A— asked to see me, and I went down to Horseguards Avenue in fear and trepidation, was sent in to him, rigidly saluted, and stood to attention, but he at once put forth his hand, and shook hands and smiled, treating me as an equal. On another occasion I met an exalted official who knew me quite well as a writer, and he kept me standing to attention on

his door-mat and treated me so formally that I felt most chilled. One thing is certain, the attitude towards the private soldier was a test for snobs and gentlemen.

One night, after a long discussion on the religion of the soldier, talked out in the arm-chair ease of a private club-room, I crossed the Park with C_____, a dear, enthusiastic clergyman, and as we passed the sentry-box at St. James's Palace at midnight a soft voice whispered, "Hullo, Graham." I looked round in surprise, and it was a room-chum on sentry.

"Don't forget the cake you promised to bring us," said he with a grin.

The priest was a gentleman in the full sense of the word. He loved the soldiers, and we stood talking to the sentry for about five minutes in the dear, dark dead of night, risking the patrols.

"Well, God bless you, my boy, God bless you," said my friend to the sentry as we passed on. In myself I felt a little abashed, because my "room-chum" was in barracks of a lewd and godless conversation, and here was the padre saying "God bless you." But I learnt afterwards that the padre knew his man, and that the soldier was in reality quite edified at being blessed. He liked it and felt blessed.

I don't know why it should appear to us that with the poor is reality, with the privates in the

army, with the working man in civil life. The life of the rich, of the cultured, of the officers, of the employers must be reality also. It is, I suppose, because everything depends on the poor, on the worker, on the common soldier—the others could be dispensed with, they cannot ; the others are few, they are many. And then the others think and talk so much about the life of the soldiers and the workers, and we feel how much, nevertheless, they are divorced from it.

I am convinced that this vast life of the poor on which rich and lettered subsist cannot be understood except from within. On the other hand, the poor themselves, the workers, and the soldiers know nothing, and could not govern the country or be the nation by themselves.

All that they know who lie in gaol
Is that the wall is strong.

It is necessary to belong to both worlds to understand and to be able to do anything of positive value. Therefore I would propose to the well-wishers of the masses, and especially to young clergy and literary men, that they give up the world in which they live, and take a job and try to work from within. They will find it appallingly difficult to live what they preach, and they may fail to affect for good the life of their neighbours, but they will learn.

“Where the people are gathered together there it is accustomed to stink,” wrote Nietzsche. Quite so. But the stink proceeds from a

ferment which is always going on, and out of that ferment are born forces which have power to change.

I often wondered whether the great ferment in the ranks meant a revolution after the war. I myself believe a people embodied under a King, even were he puny in body and dull of mind, or merely his father's son, is as excellent a conception of a nation as a republic. It is as liberal, it has as many Christian possibilities, and evolving as it does along the line of limited personal but unlimited national power, is at least as democratic. But I need hardly say how anti-royal our uneducated masses are becoming. They cannot see the use of a King and Queen when a Premier and his wife would serve, think "royalty" very expensive to keep up, and that it stands in the way of a working-man's England. Even in the rank and file of the Guards there seems little enthusiasm in singing "God save the King," which the soldiers pitifully imagine to be a prayer to God to preserve merely the person, the son of Adam who now wears the crown. And it seems to them that "God save the People" would be a better thing to sing—"Not Kings, oh Lord, but men!" The ten Americans in our ranks were openly amused at the hymns and prayers for "George Guelph," as they called him. But then, brought up without our traditions and with republican traditions, and not having given much thought to the matter, such mirth as they had at our expense was only natural. Subjects of another State

ought not to have been enlisted in our army—but, of course, necessity and the war broke many rules. As regards our other revolutionaries, I try to teach them that “God save the King” means “God save the People,” but is a nicer way of saying it—better than saying “God save our noble selves”; that the King is a symbolic personality, a living symbol of nationhood, that he is like the colours we salute, not valuable because of stuff or pattern, but because of a spiritual significance; that to have a President is excellent for a business State, but not so excellent for a nation with traditions and a complicated inheritance of feudal nobility, many-peopled empire, and historic Church; that a President and a Republic and first man first is too obvious an organism, and that a King stands in the midst of the people, whereas a President goes ahead and leads; that the President wears a crown as much as any King, but that his crown is too often the crown of personal ambition, whereas the King’s crown is the crown of the dignity of the people as a whole.

Such ideas, however, I found difficult to impart. For the world wind was constantly blowing against thrones. The ruin of Russia consequent upon the Revolution was the only object-lesson in current history, but the confusion of Press opinions left men too confused regarding Russia to be able to say anything of her. The working man looked forward to an England with a President.

We held the privilege of guarding the person

of the King, and that is why we, above other soldiers, should have had a simple but sound notion of what royalty means. The officers no doubt understood, being as they are the flower of Britain and of many noble families. In their attitude to the King breathes the atmosphere of Eton. But they are enough unto themselves. That perfect restraint which marks an officer with his men comes too naturally and is not entirely a virtue. If every officer would only make an effort to teach his men the real things, the value of our five Spartan regiments could be quintupled—they could be converted into living power. The fact is, the whole system of training needs to be overhauled with reference to higher national values. Already, theoretically, *esprit de corps* is accepted as the most valuable quality to be cultivated. The fact that "those who guard the King never retire," the glorious military traditions, are duly enforced. But the purely military aspect of *esprit de corps* ought to be supplemented in many ways.

"I could not think of a greater privilege than to mount guard over the King. It would always be something to look back upon, to have been on guard at Buckingham Palace," said a friend to me. I agreed. Every one who serves the King loyally, even in the smallest way, honours and preserves something more than the mere person of royalty. To be a Guard should be to be consecrated not only to the King, but to the nation through him.

Kings and Queens cannot themselves save

themselves. And if they could they would not be worth saving. But we can save ours if it is worth while—and not merely as “a golden link of Empire,” but as the crown of splendid nationhood.

To be put on Royal guard is the crown of training. As far as parade is concerned, it is the soldier’s greatest ordeal. No doubt there are many who would rather be in a bayonet charge than “mount Buck,” and frequently a man who “bobs on it,” as the saying is, gets a comrade to do it for him for a few shillings. For an exchange of duties is nearly always allowed. Old hands, however, who have done it five or six times, see nothing difficult in it, for they know exactly what is expected of them.

There are hours to spend washing and drying equipment, polishing the brasses, squaring the pack, fitting the braces and cartridge-pouches, the belt, the water-bottle, the haversack. Our regiment prided itself on the use of white equipment, which through much washing had become like alabaster. Each strap had a surface as of beautifully ironed linen. The brasses, under the influence of brasso, became like little mirrors, flashing at all points of the person. The rifle had to be luminous, the bayonet unimpeachable, the trousers creased correctly, the tunic without spot, hat-badge perfectly poised like a star, hat put on squarely with peak down over the eyes. One must also know something of the ritual of

guard-mounting and the mystery of open order march. The N.C.O.'s get into a frantic state of nervous tension. The drill-sergeant who carries the colours and at the same time as he marches shouts the drill orders for himself and the escort—*On the left, left form: forward!*—had a perturbed mien which caused my eyes and my lips to murmur, “Alexander of Macedon was a great man certainly, but that's no reason for smashing the furniture.” Even our R.S.M., a perfect Malvolio, seemed troubled. The officers, however, take things much more calmly, and even when making mistakes do so with an air that makes good the deficiency. When I did my first guard the inspection was made by the neatest and sharpest officer who ever took charge of the battalion whilst I was there, and he did it well—there is no doubt of that. It took a long time, and all the while the regimental band played soft music. We were standing like wood, the lieutenant and the R.S.M. looked from one to another with beady eyes, and some one else with the black book was writing down the reprimands as they occurred. It reminded me somehow of the moment of Bassanio's choice, and I fully expected to make “a swan-like end, fading in music.” But I passed muster—only Malvolio pulled the peak of my hat a little further down over my eyes as he passed, his object being to make me lift my head higher, I think. One of the Americans was next to me, and he whispered after the inspecting officers had passed by, “What do you think of it, eh, to

mount guard over the King? It's the proudest moment of my life." He understood the matter emotionally, and did not talk of George Guelph now.

It is quite right that the Guard mounting should be taken thus seriously. For the occasion is one where honour is expressed in care and smartness. And the honour is national. It struck me, however, that a great deal of the impression was lost by the cheap airs rendered by the band.

A crowd of accidental passers-by collects. The old guard at the Palace marches into position to be relieved, the new guard, preceded by the band and the colours of the regiment, marches out of barracks. Off we go to a jingling music-hall air, and a sense of mortification steals into the heart that the pipes have not preceded us. For the pipes are always national, or at least in good taste, whereas these wretched ragtime songs of the brass band put us on the level of some sort of South American Republic or less. If the music be wrong the whole ritual is wrong, and the other impressiveness counts for nought.

However, be that as it may, we present arms, we approach in a goose-step, poising uplifted toes, we exchange, and the old guard marches away, leaving us in possession and at our posts.

We do two hours' sentry-go and have four hours off. It makes four spells in the twenty-four hours, and there is nothing difficult about it. It is quiet duty, affording at least during the night hours time for thought and reflection.

In the daytime it is merely necessary to keep

alert, to present arms to members of the Royal Family and to the battalion should it march past, and to salute officers and armed parties. At night nothing happens: one has the company of the stars and the glamour of motor-lights racing through the Park. Fifteen paces to march up, turn, and fifteen paces to march down, turn, fifteen paces again, fifteen paces, halt, order arms, a pace to the rear, stand at ease. . . .

It is very pleasant to say poetry to oneself whilst marching to and fro. Two lines of Gray's *Elegy* will take the sentry up and the other two lines of the verse will bring him back again. One verse of Omar will take him up, another will take him down. And at night, when the moon-light disguises with theatrical grandeur the shoddy masonry of the Palace, the noble lines of English come aptly to the mind and guide the steps. "Whatever it is your lot to do in this war try to live nobly, make a heaven of hell, go inward." So I often whisper to myself—often whisper in vain.

Whilst off duty and lying in full equipment in the guard-house, this night of my guard, the Germans came over and, *prom, prom, posh*, the maroons shot forth, and hard upon them the metallic reports of many air-craft guns.

"Stand to!"

We all get up and stand ready with our rifles for any emergency. Every one grumbles. But the guard-room fire blazes merrily, and the guns keep up a joyful hubbub. Suddenly some one says, "No one can persuade Queen Alexandra

to leave her bedroom and go down to the cellars. She says that if she's meant to die by a bomb she can't save herself by going to a cellar." All approve of this fallacious argument, especially the old soldiers who have used the formula in the trying circumstances of the trenches. Then another says he hopes a bomb will come and blast them all to —. "What good have they ever done us?" Then comes much more silly talk about revolution, plentifully interlarded with that bad language by which a soldier seeks to prove his manhood.

Just before the all-clear bugles I march out with the relief and resume my post once more. Once more, fifteen up, fifteen down, and the moonlight streaming across the way. In a moment of ennui I notice some words vaguely scratched on a pillar, done by a sentry with his bayonet on some past night in the dark and empty hours when there is no one to see what is done. And these were the words :

Roll on the Duration.
Roll on Peace.
Roll on the Revolution.

And in those lines I felt expressed how exasperating and boring the Great War had become.

However, *ho-ho, ha-ha*, the bicyclist buglers are tearing past, giving the all-clear signal at last, and searchlights break across the sky and begin to make mysterious crosses and lettering in the heavens. The flagrant beam stands a long while, as if it has become a permanency, and then suddenly moves, swings round, whilst

another creeps towards it. Certain messages are being conveyed, but none can say what they are :

En avant, then ; fifteen up, turn, fifteen down, turn. . . .

Buckingham Palace is an ugly building. It is not fit for the King and Queen of England to live in, and if it were not so large and imposing it would be pulled down. But a constant means of grace in our barrack life was the Chapel, opposite which so often we lined up for drill. It is beautiful exteriorly, and I wonder why we cannot keep our building in keeping with it. Our barracks are decent, though in need of repair. But in our near vicinity behold Buckingham Palace, Queen Anne's Mansions, and some sort of Diamond Jubilee red-brick commercial horror climbing up to make a background for the Chapel.

But the Chapel is beautiful. Our religious life ought to have been good with such a temple in our barrack yard.

I spent most of my Sundays at home, but on the three or four occasions when duty held me at barracks, I went to religious service at the Chapel. Once I paraded for Church of England service, but afterwards became officially a Presbyterian—joined the true religion, as the Jocks call it. On free Sundays I went *civilly* to church.

The great contrast in the two types of service was that in the military chapel you felt you had

England with you in church, even if the service were dull, but that in the civil church, no matter how full of *life* the service might be, you felt as if somehow the real base of England was lacking. In the ordinary church in war-time you had a gathering of stray units who somehow did not belong organically to England. But in the military chapel you had, willy-nilly, the physical driving power of the nation. England was present even if England did not sing, and England's knees were in the pews even if England did not pray.

Nevertheless, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that I would infinitely rather go to any civil church than to any military one, and that for me the Church parade has been one of the unpleasant parts of this enforced military life.

Still, the military has the national chorus. It has in live flesh and blood what Westminster Abbey has in live walls and memories. And our chapel is vocal from its walls also. It is alive with sacred fresco, and looks more like a Byzantine cathedral than an English church. It is all adorned, all colour, all expression. And all is in memory of the brave who have died. There is not a tint or a figure that has been added in the mere spirit of ornament. All that is in it is consecrated glory. For that reason it would be good to purge it of the regimental band which supplies the place of organ, but has no true function in it, give the chaplain leave to go, and then try to realise what the beautiful building full of soldiers could mean.

How many of those who guard the King have died for England, have carried to the Altar the complete sacrifice ! How many poor soldiers in our many wars have died on foreign fields and been forgotten ! These crimsons on the walls are their crimsons. If we could sing, their voices would swell the chorus. Anonymous England ! The soldiers' Church ! If some one could teach the soldiers to sing the Te Deum or even "Holy ! Holy ! Holy !" as it should be sung, meaning it, then all the other ranks would sing, behind, on the left, on the right, all who died before we came as well as we who wear the uniform now, and England would have a voice again.

But there is ever a fettering influence at work. There is one great mistake about these beautiful walls. It is that definite names have been inscribed on them—the names of a dozen or so officers of various generations, and the finer thing has been missed, of leaving it all anonymous—for Jesus' sake.

It is sad to see St. George and the Dragon merely in memory of George M——, scholar, sportsman, friend, and the rest, instead of all the Georges. Even as I write comes news of a George who has died in the trenches, and the crimson of his blood needs a ray in our memory and in the church. Cannot all these definite names on the chapel wall be erased, or else all the thousands who have died in the Guards be put on ?

But we are all in the pews and the regimental band will not begone, and here comes the large

and jovial and rather popular chaplain, a hearty old man of the world who evidently hates cant of any kind, and has no corner in his heart for conscientious objectors.

A light did shine
In thy rosy rubicund face
Which showed an outward visible sign
Of an inward spiritual grace.

His sermon begins with, "Why halt ye between two opinions?" and ends with, "The service of Caesar is the service of God."

I think that in the army that is generally believed, but I had never heard a clergyman say it before.

On parade in the weekly routine we looked so well that no one would have thought it shame to identify us with a service higher than that of the King. Did not the Christians in civil attire look very much down at heel compared with us? And in patience and suffering the soldier of the King treads a thornier way than the average professing Christian. Lord Hugh Cecil remarks in his study of the army: "The citizen becomes a soldier, and as a soldier thinks nothing too much to do and to suffer, and in all that he gives his country walks not unworthily in the steps of Christ. But when he has once become the State's instrument without independent will or life of his own, the State uses him, not for Christ's work. . . ."

That is where the cleavage occurs.

There is much beauty in the symbols of the army—the salute, the presenting of arms, and the rest—and they are expressive of the service of the King or of the State. A salute means : I recognise your authority, and we are all bound together under the King. Arms presented, in which, as it were, the rifles are held not as ready to be fired but as ready to be given to some one else, means : My arms belong to you, and though I wield a weapon of offence, I do not wield it for myself, but for you and for the King. The colours, crimson as with the blood of those who have died rather than flee, is the symbol of the soul of the regiment. They must not appear without an escort. When the colours are brought on parade the band plays, or should play, low music, as it were the music of the heart ; we salute or present arms, and even civilians raise their hats. The colours fly not only for the living, but for all who have died in the regiment for the King, not only as an augury of battles to be won, but as a token of every field of the past. All bugle-calls denote that a soldier's life is a watch and a vigil. He does not go by the clock, or claim any time as his own, but gives obedience instant upon the demand of his superior. The bugle-call is the voice of the King.

The King is a living, moving symbol, and means England. He does not stand for himself, but for all of us. The Queen, being the bride of the King, is the symbol of the soul and the honour of England. The nation is bound to the King in duty, to the Queen in chivalry. Honour is

universally paid to the soldier, because, in putting off his own clothes and putting on those of the King, he gives up his own free will to be obedient to the country's will, and he sacrifices his birth-right of freedom, taking up voluntarily the yoke of sacrifice. When a soldier dies, the Union Jack is laid on his body in token that he died in the service of the State, and that the State takes the responsibility for what it ordered him to do as a soldier. On the other hand, in the Union Jack may be seen the mingling of crosses, that is, of sacrifice. The reversed arms at a funeral are an acknowledgement of the shame of killing. Death puts the rifle to shame, and the reversal of the barrel is a fitting sign of reverence. It provides part of the atmosphere of military mourning. The shots fired in the air are fired at imaginary devils, which might get into men's hearts at such a moment as the burial of a comrade-in-arms. An old superstition has it that the doors of men's hearts stand ajar at such times, and devils may easily get in. The Last Post is the *Nunc Dimittis* of the dead soldier. It is the last bugle-call. As you stand in heavy cloaks about the new-dug grave in which the dead comrade is lying, it seems as if in a sepulchral way he also must hear it—as it were the last voice of all earthly, persistently, persistently calling. It is the last, but it gives promise of reveille—of the great reveille which ultimately the Angel Gabriel ought to blow.

God Save the King!—The National Anthem does not merely mean God save the Monarch,

but God save the State embodied in him. It is a beautiful way of asking salvation as a nation.

All these are the symbols of the service of the King, and rightly understood, show the ideal side of rendering to Caesar the things which are Caesar's. They ought to provide the true atmosphere of the army, showing the army at its highest and best.

Beautiful, however, as they are, they ought always to give way before the greater symbols of the Church. Within the church there is no saluting ; officers and men are equal at the altar-rail, partaking in communion. Even the singing of the National Anthem, if over-stressed, may be out of place in church, and nothing is more wrong than interrupting a man who is kneeling before God in order to make him stand up to sing "God Save the King." For the same reason the idea that curates and young priests ought, against their will, to be made to join the army is mistaken. The symbols of God are higher than the symbols of the King.

Besides the serious aspect of the soldier's duty there is a good deal of humour in the daily round, which begins with "Hey, Johnnie Cope" and ends with "Donald Blue."¹ Some one in the army allotted hymns to each act in the soldier's life. Thus :

¹ The pipes blow reveille at Wellington Barracks to the tune of "Hey, Johnnie Cope, are ye waukin' yet ?" For "Lights out" they play "Donald Blue," sometimes parodied in the words, "Oh, good Lord, my rifle's rusty."

<i>Reveille</i>	.	.	.	.	“Christians, Awake !”
<i>First Parade</i>	.	.	.	.	“Art thou weary, art thou languid.”
<i>Breakfast</i>	.	.	.	.	“Meekly wait and murmur not.”
<i>Sergeant-Major’s Parade</i>	.	.	.	.	“When he cometh, when he cometh.”
<i>Swedish Drill (P.T.)</i>	.	.	.	.	“Here we suffer grief and pain.”
<i>Route March</i>	.	.	.	.	“Onward ! Christian soldiers.”
<i>Dinner</i>	.	.	.	.	“COME, YE THANKFUL PEOPLE, COME.”
<i>Rifle Drill</i>	.	.	.	.	“Go, labour on.”
<i>Officer’s Lecture</i>	.	.	.	.	“Tell me the old, old story.”
<i>Dismiss</i>	.	.	.	.	“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”
<i>Tea</i>	.	.	.	.	“What means this eager, anxious throng ?”
<i>Free for the Night</i>	.	.	.	.	“Oh Lord, how happy should we be !”
<i>Last Post</i>	.	.	.	.	“Safely, safely gathered in.”
<i>Lights Out</i>	.	.	.	.	“Peace, perfect peace.”
<i>Inspection of the Guard</i>	.	.	.	.	“Sleep on, beloved.”

IV

ESPRIT DE CORPS

I LISTENED one day to the reminiscences of one who had been regimental sergeant-major. As far as my memory serves, let me record his most interesting words :

“ I was born of a Scottish family. As most of you know, I joined the army in the ranks. As a lad of eighteen I enlisted and went to Little Sparta. I had the hard time there which all of you had, and I assure you I did not escape without being once thrown into the guard-room or having to fight one of the old soldiers to show what stuff I was made of. In due course the squad in which I trained ‘ passed out,’ and I went up to barracks in London. I did very well there, and was a pattern of smartness. I very soon got my stripes. I became that very hard-worked person, a lance-corporal, and was at every one’s beck and call—the hardest months of my soldiering career. But I did so well that I was sent back to Little Sparta as a drill-instructor, and it was my task to take over squads of raw recruits such as I had myself but lately been, and teach them and drill them into being soldiers. I ‘ passed out ’ many

squads with credit, and then again was ordered up to London. I had returned as full corporal, and I was then made lance-sergeant. I was promoted in course of time to be sergeant, and ultimately to be regimental sergeant-major. So I've been through all the routine. I have a very large experience of army life and of the main things in it—discipline and *esprit de corps*.

“ Little Sparta is a place of very hard discipline, the training is hard and no faults are overlooked. But I came from a Scottish home where discipline was hard, and I cannot say I found the discipline of the barracks harder than that of home. I was punished, and, as I have said, did some extra drills, and was put in the guard-room. I had a fight, but the only thing I really resented was the humiliating personal remarks which the corporals and sergeants seemed to like to indulge in. And I can say without any reserve that no one should ever address remarks to a soldier which are humiliating, because it creates a desire for revenge which is fatal to the preservation of a true *esprit de corps*. Injustice also, of course, is another thing which is intolerable. Instructors ought always to treat their men as if they *were* men, not as if they were a sort of lower species of animal. The chief fault of those in authority nowadays is that they think too much of themselves and too little of the men under them. Now it should be an axiom that you can never think too much of or do too much for those who are under you. Training recruits is not just breaking in horses. It can

be the highest possible work for King and Country.

“When I came up to our London barracks I must say I was surprised to observe the difference in discipline. Here, compared with Little Sparta, everything was slack. On the first evening I was much struck by seeing a splendid sergeant of the King’s Guard in full dress playing skittles at the back of the canteen—with a set of privates. Such intimacy I could never have thought possible. I saw here much drunkenness and unpunctuality, squaring of punishments, gambling, and the like. This was, of course, many, many years ago, and I do not know what it is like now. Soon I got my stripes, and I decided to be regimental from the first. On my first morning I told an orderly that he had left the slops which ought to be emptied first thing each morning, and that he must empty them at once. He said ‘All right,’ and went away and did something else, practically ignoring me. So I had him at once marched to the guard-room, and he was very severely punished. After that it was seen that I was not a person to be trifled with, and my commands were always obeyed. I never, never played cards with the privates in the barrack-room ; I kept rigidly teetotal. If comrades drew me into the canteen and they had their beer, I had my ginger-beer, and I kept my temper and smiled, however much I was chaffed. All sorts of tricks were played on other N.C.O.’s, and the slacker they were the more tricks were played on them—such tricks as whitewashing their

tunics or throwing their clothes out of the window. I don't say that my example improved the state of things, for it is impossible for one man to make much difference, but I was that sort of man by temperament.

"It was a change for me when I was sent back to Little Sparta as a drill-instructor, to take charge of squads of new recruits and make them into soldiers. I think the two years I spent this way were the happiest years of my life. I renewed my faith in army life at the fount. I rejoiced in the glitter and sparkle of the N.C.O.'s on parade, in the snap and finish in the drill, in the regularity and sobriety of the men, in the sports, in the emulation in hardihood and smartness, in the absence of corruption and of slackness. Little Sparta suited me, and it was somewhat of a shock again when promoted to lance-sergeant I returned to the easy-going London barracks. Still, I pursued my old way and was reserved with privates, never gambled with them, was firm and stood no nonsense, but always cheery and happy all the same. In due course I was made drill-sergeant, and was a most popular N.C.O. all the time.

"All this was in the 2nd Battalion of the regiment, and at that time we outshone the premier battalion very considerably both in discipline and in drill, and there was a desire on the part of the command to smarten it up a bit. With that in view, a keen and stern adjutant was appointed, and I was brought there as regimental sergeant-major. Then in a way I thought I

had my chance. There were five years in front of me as R.S.M., and in that time I would turn a slack battalion into one that was as smart as any one could wish. The adjutant was a proper martinet, and I worked in with him, being as regimental and strict as I knew how, remaining, however, always just, though often, I admit, harsh. I know now that in any case the sergeant-major has always to take his tone from the adjutant, and that a hard adjutant must always mean a hard sergeant-major. And from being a most popular man I became the most unpopular person in barracks. But I made a smart regiment. I had always a very good word of command, clear, stern, far-reaching, and now I cultivated the special terrible voice of a regimental sergeant-major. I brought the men to a high state of perfection in drill, and could drill them at last without using a word, merely by opening and shutting my eyes. But I had seen other sergeant-majors have as great success on the parade-ground as I, and that did not content me. I wanted to have all the other side of their life as smart, and I took care to arrange matters so that under my authority it was impossible to square sergeants for punishment. I knew what every one in the barracks was doing all the while, and I stopped the intimacies of privates and N.C.O.'s, curtailed gambling, put an end to the unpunctualities at the gate, which could formerly have been squared by a tip to the sergeant of the guard.

"All the while, however, I was thinking about my job, and was not altogether content

with the state of my battalion. I was still very unpopular ; there was a great deal of ill-feeling. Some N.C.O.'s had got themselves transferred from the battalion in order to get out of my ken. Pressure was brought to bear to get rid of me, but the authorities approved of me. I did not, however, altogether approve of myself, and I felt ill at ease watching my perfect battalion do everything perfectly whilst hating me all the time.

“ The adjutant left us and a kinder one came in his place. My five years passed, and I was due for a change also. But I asked to remain, and I determined on a change of tactics. Whilst remaining as hard as ever with the non-commissioned officers, I began to treat the men more kindly. If I saw a man doing a thing he ought not to be doing whilst off parade, I looked the other way and ‘ saw nothing,’ but I never let the N.C.O.’s off. But this policy did not succeed. For then the N.C.O.’s took their revenge on the men, and learned all manner of tricks of deception. In short, my policy begot a great deal of disloyalty to me among the N.C.O.’s. We were not working together at all. The upshot of all was that I had to give up my old point of view entirely—of absolute, unquestioned obedience and a regiment ruled as with a rod of iron—and I learned more and more to interest myself in the personal lives of N.C.O.’s as well as privates, and to win them to my side by bonds of interest and affection. I learned that it is necessary to gain the confidence of a

battalion, and not only to command them, but to lead them. I think perhaps in my lifetime the necessities have all changed. My first way was the old-fashioned way, and was good enough a hundred years ago. But something different is needed by men to-day. They won't stand the old martinet style of treatment, and quite right, too. A correct discipline must be obtained, and you cannot get it without absolute obedience. But a fine discipline needs a warm glowing *esprit de corps*, and to get that you must also win men's hearts."

The old sergeant-major's experience had a counterpart in our own. When we for our part left Little Sparta and came to London we were glad of the easier ways, and it eased our hearts to find the corporals and the sergeants reduced to the level of human beings, sleeping and living in the same barrack-room. And we realised that when a non-commissioned officer has been drunk once or twice in the presence of the privates in the same room he has not the authority over them that he is supposed to have, still less when he plays cards and wins or loses money from them. It was amusing to hear them cheeked and flatly disobeyed—in fun. "After you've done your firing you'll be a toff, my boy," they said. "You'll have your midnight pass. You can go to the halls twice a week and spoon with yer girl in the Park." We were quite ready to be toffs. The relaxed discipline was a consider-

able relief. I noticed that all the men grew more confident in themselves, and that the cowed look seemed to leave their faces. The moving life of London fused their lives. At the same time, however, most of the men seemed to fall off a little in good looks and bodily health. Excitements and late nights undid what the peace and dullness of Little Sparta evenings had achieved. Men slept in the barrack-rooms in the afternoon—"got down to it," and wakened up in time for tea and the razzle-dazzle of the evening. Then we lived in a slacker way. The rooms and the beds were far from the cleanliness of Little Sparta. We were not marched once a week to the *Trio-juncta-in-uno-bath*, nor inspected to see if our bodies were clean. And three in a bath is better than no bath at all. In London you bathed when and where you liked. In the barrack-rooms at nights windows supposed to be kept open were superstitiously kept shut, and you could taste and smell and handle the atmosphere produced. There were the stale leavings of supper on plates, men with dirty bodies, sometimes men drunk, sometimes men sick, a huge fire burning, an overcrowded room.

The standard of smartness seemed reduced, both in personal appearance and in the way one kept bed and locker. There was one unforgivable sin, and that was having the handle of one's entrenching tool dirty. The metal part of this tool had to be like silver ; the wooden part had to be polished with sandpaper till it was

white and smooth as ivory. And after all it was only a pick to be used eventually in digging trenches. Punishments were showered thick and fast, but were taken lightly and done lightly. The best men fared equally with the worst. If you did a punishment you felt a bit of a fool realising that sixpence might have got you off. To do an extra drill was called "to pay a drill," and it was not uncommon for the sergeant to say to you just after the sentence had been pronounced by the officer : "Will you pay it now or pay it at four o'clock ?" and you could discharge the matter there and then. An old sergeant once propounded this pleasant theory : "When your name is in the book for a punishment-drill that in itself is sufficient punishment. There's no need for a fellow to go tramping round the barrack-square for an hour."

When the soldiers' weekly wage was raised it came in very handy for paying his way, but there was rather a temptation to N.C.O.'s to bring you before an officer for a trifling offence, and so get you down in the book for a drill, and sometimes when the officer said *One* you found it had been entered in the book as *two*. One felt annoyed, but then sergeants and men were on very good swearing terms. We all rather admired B—, the volunteer from the Far West, who insisted on doing his punishment-drills when awarded, and said, "I'll take my medicine ; I think it will be good for me."

Our training was largely a matter of preparation for active service, and some of it, such as

the bombing course, was excellent in itself and very interesting ; others, such as the gas-drill, was not so pleasant. The only things I was complimented on were bayonet-fighting and bomb-throwing—which rather tickled me, being of a Christian temperament and more ready to be killed than to kill. In drill I remained “a dizzy devil” the sergeant-major remarked. But I did not get into trouble whilst doing guards, though I devised several ingenious tricks for reading poetry whilst walking up and down on sentry. Being on sentry at the barracks from two to four in the morning, or at some such time, was always rather thrilling to me. To march up and down and to know the moon-light glimmered on your bayonet, and that you and all the circumstances of your post looked larger and grander than by day, was somewhat of an enchantment. These things, however, appealed to different temperaments differently. I remember my surprise one night when the sergeant who should have marched us to our posts was fast asleep. I went to relieve my man, and he said, “ You’ll find a newspaper in a bit of board in the sentry-box, I should get down to it if I were you ; there’s nobody about.” I never found sleep prized so much as in the army ; there it is a material commodity like roast beef. You “ get down to it ” with the solid pleasure of satisfying an appetite or a lust. Sleep becomes a bad habit like the overuse of tobacco or drink.

I found in London that whilst in charge

of a foul-mouthed, unsympathetic, and brutal sergeant-major we were a very wretched company in our drill and general turn-out, but when this man was reduced in rank and we were given to a capable, clean-minded, and sympathetic young fellow, who knew his work well, we made the most extraordinary progress. After three weeks, from being the worst we became almost the best, and we made a most pleasing show in the great inter-company drilling competition on the barrack-square.

Our hours of drill were very light compared with those of Little Sparta. Our day was generally over at three, and sometimes at noon. Those living within a reasonable proximity to barracks could get sleeping-out passes, which enabled them to wash and dress and do many things at home. Those who had no homes had usually their girls and the Park, or the kitchens or servants' parlour of some great house to which they adjourned.

The men's sweethearts, and sometimes one man would have several, kept them in cigarettes and sweets, cakes, and often money. So a man would say, "I must meet her to-night, it's her pay-day." When the girl was a munition-worker it can be understood how the tables had been turned during the war, and she was the rich one and could afford to treat *him*. When men were on duty their girls would come to the railings and ask to see them, and often the men would return with pleasing presents, which greatly contributed to our suppers. Some of

the men walked out with servants from the big houses of the west, especially Park Lane, and I often heard well-known hostesses mentioned by the men. It was rather amusing to think that whilst the quality had been eating dinner up above, a burly soldier had been waiting in the kitchen below stairs for his share in the same. He had his share in due course, and was not without his glass of champagne upon occasion. Well, certainly those below stairs are as human as those above. One day in the wash-house a man said to me, " Didn't I have the pleasure of waiting on you one night at Mrs. C——'s ? " And he mentioned one or two other guests. " Ah, yes," said I. " What a pleasant evening it was. It's curious how we meet again, isn't it ? " whereupon we became very good barrack friends.

Life in barracks during the war exhibited all the abnormalities of a strange time. More recruits were rushed through the course of training in a few years than ordinarily passed through in a quarter of a century ; whereas formerly the sergeants and drill-sergeants and the rest would know infallibly every soldier's face in the battalion, now the faces changed so rapidly, what with new men coming in and men who had been wounded returning, never more than one in three could be recognised. The control which before the war must have been more personal was now conventional. No such condition of

excellence as prevailed under the sway of that ex-sergeant-major who gave his reminiscences could obtain now. All the weeds of the system were growing ; all the weeds that ever showed themselves in the garden. So it was possible to see what were the problems in front of a practical idealist should he wish to make us perfect within as perfect without. We needed another Hildebrand to shake and purify us like a mighty wind, though not a Hildebrand with a mere passion for reform, but a wise and experienced one, such as that mellowed R.S.M. who talked so well on what had been and what might be.

I have no doubt myself that the best virtue to cultivate in a regiment is *esprit de corps*. On that and not on fear and punishment and bluster should discipline be founded. A higher sense of *esprit de corps* would have caused a good deal of that slackness so comforting to civilians in khaki to disappear, but at the same time it would have procured more liberties and better social conditions, which would have more than made up for what was lost in the other direction. Of course by *esprit de corps* is not meant that narrow pride in the regiment which at one time caused the Jocks to fight the Bill-Browns in every public-house about Victoria Station. It should acknowledge the splendour of brother regiments. To act under the influence of *esprit de corps* means to act in the spirit of your regiment, and if you speak of the larger *esprit de corps*, national *esprit de corps*, it means to act in the spirit of the

nation to which you belong. It is to use the *common* sense of your battalion and your country, and live according to that.

When a man has put on the King's uniform he has by that act resigned individual striving after perfection. His perfection has become locked up in his relationship to his fellows. He still wants freedom, but he wants it in a different way. Perfect freedom does not mean isolation but perfect organisation—a place in a perfect system where every one is free and yet every one is instinctively disciplined, where no one hinders any one else but every one by his very existence is helping every one else.

The mushroom army of the war was a place where for most of the finer issues every man was hindering every one else. There was only the beginning of a fine *esprit de corps*. Fear and punishment were still in control and seemed to be the supreme appeal for the establishment of absolute obedience. The prison wall shed its baleful shadow on the young soul. The evil of institutionalism was the evil of the army, and whole regiments had the blank faces of institute children, whole regiments were stunted, were dried up, were in corporal decay solely owing to *no spirit*, or little spirit or a wrong conception of what discipline should rest upon.

The ideal for a regiment is that every man should amplify every other man's regimental personality. The famous deeds of men in the regiment in days gone by should be known equally with the famous deeds of the present

war. The story of a bayonet charge, of a desperate stand, of a patient defence against terrible odds, of a long and arduous march ; the victories of the sports field, of the boxing ring, of football leagues as far as they are known, enlarge the life of the regiment and improve the spirit. Poems and rhymes written by officers and men, songs sung, lectures given—all these help *esprit de corps*. But what should help more than all is a true relationship between officers and men and a real understanding. Slack officers, sarcastic, nonchalant, overbearing, snobbish officers are no use in any regiment, and only take away from its common life, as do also cowards, fops, and ladies' men. There is no one so quick as the common soldier in grasping whether in reality the officer in charge of him is a gentleman. And every ranker wants to have over him a man who is a gentleman. Ah, how the army has been pestered and made miserable by duds of one kind and another ! In the army, allegiance should spring as much from hero-worship as from the rules of discipline.

Hero-worship and comradeship, pride in one's nation and equal pride in one's regiment, ideals as triumphant as the colours themselves, living interest and enthusiasm in all ranks—these are the true substitutes for fear and punishment and military law.

It goes without saying that regard must be had to the clearing away of soldiers' injustices. More care should be given to the cooking and serving of his food, and a private soldier should

not go short whilst all those who handle and distribute the food surfeit from too much. And medical officers should be allowed to treat sick men more as they would civilian clients. The washing of linen should be done properly. More care should be taken that a man's pay does actually reach him in its entirety and does not leak into the pockets of other ranks. Men sent on leave should infallibly receive their ration-money. No brutal advantage should be taken of the fact that a man once in the army is the army's slave. Care should rather be taken to give compensatory privileges when unusual demands are made upon soldiers. Officers should be on the alert to learn of anything that the soldier feels to be an injustice, and if the seemingly unjust thing is something necessary, though hard, he must put the soldier into a positive way of regarding it. This can often be done by kindness and politeness.

What is the matter with the army as a whole is that there is not enough life in it. It is more of a national bondage than a national club. But it could be the most splendid of our institutions. In the army the nation should act and feel as one man. That is why we get into step and try to march as one body and to feel in our veins one loyalty. On the outbreak of a war the national instinct always says, "Close the ranks, forget all differences and act as one man!" There is a cry for that united front which the army should naturally possess. But the army's grievances make of it rather a collection of warring

and grumbling individuals than a warm glowing unity. And the grievances can never be got rid of by a more severe system of fear and punishment—they can be got rid of by the rule of a large national *esprit de corps*.

V

TO THE FRONT

WE are living in the cage, and it might be jolly but that Polyphemus comes in every now and then and feels us and considers us and carries some away. Our companions are taken from us one by one and we hear of them afterwards as being dead, hear of them terribly mauled by the monster. It is borne in upon the mind that each and all of us must go in time, you and I as well. And the question arises in the mind : How shall we fare in the hands of the terrible man-eater ?

There is a polite euphemism for “ Polyphemus wants you.” It is : “ The following are warned to be in readiness to proceed overseas.” Ah, the very rumour of that notice raises a tremulous breeze in the whole barracks, a breeze that plays on the wind-harps of men’s affections. It causes a consternation among us as if at some bygone period we had sold ourselves to the Devil for seven years’ happiness, and now suddenly we saw the sinister figure appear claiming the execution of his bargain.

Every one whispers to his neighbour, "*Are you for it?*" "Yes," says the neighbour reluctantly, "my name is on the list," or "No," says he in a whisper, "my name is not on the list." "Oh, that means *you're not for it.*" It is that one-eyed monster who appeared in these parts about the beginning of August 1914. He satisfies his appetite on the bodies of young men. It was said that when he died of repletion a League of Nations would be formed to prevent his resurrection. Meanwhile the little victims of the hour sang in mock-pitiful strains :

Oh my, I don't want to die,
I—want to go home.

Immediately the warning is given blood-red tabs with the name of the regiment printed in white are sewn on the shoulders of our tunics. We are marked, as it were, with blood, and are like trees with the gash of the hatchet designing them to be felled, or like rams marked for sacrifice to the idol. "I see you've *got them up,*" says one to the other with the curious hush of awe. "They say you can pick up no new girl in the Park when you've got them up," says another. "They all know what it means." The girls you know already "take on so" that it's better to borrow some one else's tunic till the last moment. Perhaps better still to avoid them and go somewhere up the Edgware Road and get drunk.

Some of the marked men are new, some have been out before and have wound stripes on their

arms. The men who have been wounded seem to take the matter more philosophically than the rest. Of the others there are always one or two who imagine they can escape the hand of Fate by resorting to various tricks to avoid it at the last moment, by reporting sick, committing a crime, trying to square some one, or bolting home until the draft has gone. The call brings out the courage in most and the selfishness in some. For it is selfish to try to escape : if one man's name is crossed off the list for any reason another's must be put on. And though it is selfishness to want to escape, it is a much-qualified selfishness which can find excuse in the pain of parting, perhaps finally, with wife and family ; in the pain which this taking away is going to cause to a loving woman.

I recall to mind a rather hard type of Scotsman nearing middle age, patient and taciturn, Private M—. He was warned for overseas. He was not very popular, and I remember a neighbour saying to him with a sarcastic grimace, "A sore blow, eh ?" But M— did not answer. He sent a telegram to his wife, who lived in some remote place near Banff or Nairn, and she came down to him, leaving her bairns in a neighbour's care. He said Good-b'ye to her—with what suffering ! He got the Good-b'ye over, and went on grimly and quietly disposing of his spare kit, making his will, and doing all those final things that precede the going to the Front.

Next day he was, however, sent for and told he was *not for it*.

To his astonishment he was suddenly free again. We watched him in the barrack-room. Joy curiously suffused and transfigured his usually inexpressive countenance, and a generous flow of life-blood rushed through his veins. He wired to his wife again. The unopened parcel which she had brought him the day before he now opened, and distributed among us short-bread and home-baked scones. He was not one who gave away things as a rule. But now a light-heartedness seemed to possess him and smiles flickered across his face. He said, "I am glad I'm not going to the Front—for my wife's sake. I've always been quite ready to do my bit, and would only have wanted to get out of it because of her." How true that was ! He was a typical man of duty. Next morning, with pipers and escorting crowds, the draft went to the station to entrain. And he, with a sense of duty upon him, got everything ready to go in case after all he might be wanted. So he was. One of the men had gone out the night before and not returned to barracks. The sergeant-major looked round, saw M—— all ready, and in a matter-of-fact way bade him take the other's place. And he bit his lip and went. Later he was killed.

Should the warning for the draft synchronise with pay-day there is likely to be a wild night following. I vividly recall a night when one man in a raving state wanted to kill people with his bayonet—"It's the twenty-second German

I've killed to-night," he kept on saying—and he had to be constantly disarmed and thrown with a whop on his bed ; when the men lying each side of me slept "in marching order," *i.e.* with boots on. One was sick in between beds, another man hung with his head out of a window and, having been violently sick, fell asleep thus. Sergeant Five was one of those warned for that draft. He had got into trouble at Little Sparta barracks, and for his sins was being sent on active service. He came in late that night in a conversational state, and sat by the embers of the fire talking to himself for hours about his wife and little ones : "I believe in God and all that ; I'm not afraid to die," said he, "but the question I ask is, If I die, what are they going to do ? What will the army do for *them* ? Why, nothing, of course. That's just it. There are too many widows and orphans."

But what a contrast the atmosphere of the fourth year of the war to that of the first ! When the original summons came and the "Tipperary Boys" were called they were happy and excited beyond measure. German cannon devoured their hearts, and there followed Kitchener's wonderful army with their enthusiasm. They knew better than those who had gone first the hell to which they were going, but they were eager. Their ranks were thinned, and the Derby men and the first conscripts went out. And they were cheerful, even with their grievances and troubles. But later came a bitter residue of "indispens-

ables," of men near middle-age heavily committed with wife and children, of B men marked medically A, and what not. The first fought for a wage, the second for an ideal, and the rest because they had to. The curious thing in my experience was—to carry the record to the later times in France—that when it came to the point the last fought as well as the first, and the lachrymose became eventually, under active-service conditions, as cheerful, as ardently patriotic and proud of the duty they were performing as any of the rest or of the dead had ever been.

In the summer of 1917 the war might have been compromised in a peace, but in that summer we entered into a large alliance with America, and an enormous accession of military and financial aid was ensured. Meanwhile, however, in Russia the program which the Allies had hoped to realise when sanctioning the March revolution failed ; Germany succeeded in making peace there, and in buying or taking a large quantity of artillery, machine-gunnery, and ammunitions largely supplied to Russia from the West. She could also call off a large number of soldiers hitherto employed in guarding against the Russian menace. A partially disarmed nation, even if capricious in her political tendencies, is not a military danger to a militant neighbour. The autumn and winter on the Western Front provided a lull broken only by the "Byng Boys'" victory and the German success of Cambrai,

so heroically checked by the Guards at Gouzeaucourt. The sense of a growing German power crept into the military mind. This was confirmed by the extent of the Germano-Austrian victory over the Italians, where it was claimed another thousand guns fell into the enemy's hands and a corresponding quantity of ammunition. After this no doubt was felt but that Germany would be found to be holding the initiative in the spring. She would again be able to batter herself to bits as she did at Verdun. Meanwhile her civil population would starve, and we would hold on till better days, when American reinforcements would enable us to take the upper hand. The lull continued throughout the winter ; leave for the men continued. Our training continued in a pleasant, leisurely way. After our gruelling at Little Sparta we had three months more in London ; we were just going off for even another month, a month's field-work in the country, when the crash came.

On March 21, with the Kaiser himself in command, the Germans made their most grand attempt to defeat us, to divide our armies from those of the French and to secure the mouth of the Somme. We know now that if the combustion of the Last Day had set in during the war it would have been described in the Press as a pitiful attempt at frightfulness with meagre results. But consternation would have reigned nevertheless. So it was in this last week in March. The true significance of the German

advance sounded as a trumpet-blast in all the training-camps of England, and every man in khaki knew England had need of him. Was it not shortly after this that the papers all printed articles on what the new drafts had done at the Front? Our hour had come.

All other arrangements were cancelled. We all fell in, and there was a great clearance. The warnings to proceed overseas were soon posted, and it was found they affected a great number who did not expect to be sent. At such a moment of destiny, however, it was not becoming any man to take one step to get his name erased from the list, and I think, somehow, all felt in that way, though not a few were advertised to go who would have been omitted had there been time to consider their uses. It was a great moment of national hush and of suppressed excitement. The tragic nature of the moment dispelled the more selfish and sickly ways of looking on the fight, and it was marvellous what a good, quiet, patriotic fervour developed in a few days then. Shirkers became volunteers, grousers and pacifists became patriots, selfish men became unselfish and pessimists optimists. What a change from the atmosphere of the departure of other drafts I had witnessed in time of deadlock, lull, stagnation! As I overheard an officer say at the time, "August 1914 is going to repeat itself." And so it was.

The time we came up from Little Sparta to

the historic London barracks was the night of Christmas Eve, but it was not serene. The day we left for the battle-front was Good Friday. The fact filled us all with a tremor which was perhaps a little superstitious. Destiny, in a sort of halo of days, seemed to light our brows and mark us out for sacrifice and service.

“So we are going to set out on the day J. C. was crucified,” said one.

“Oh shut up, for God’s sake, do,” said another nervously.

“It’s the luckiest day in the year,” said another, with the consciousness of a lucky star.

“I shall never come back,” says another.

“If you look at it like that, of course you never will,” his companion replies.

“Are ye glad to go?” some one asks of an American.

“*You bet!*”

There were many rumours and contradictions and cancellings and re-postings. Notice had been very short. We were rushed hither and thither by sergeants and quartermaster-sergeants. We filed half-naked past the doctor, who passed us fit with great rapidity. We lined up at the tailor’s den to have the red tabs sewn on the shoulders of our tunics. We received new metal helmets, waterproof capes, and draft-kit, field-dressings, identification discs, pay-books. Our wills were filed at the orderly room. We paraded for various inspections, and all the while there

were conflicting rumours as to postponement, acceleration, cancellation, which expressed themselves in an oft-reiterated "You're for it. No, you're not for it."

But all unfolded itself in an apparent fittingness. We went on Good Friday, and it was at noon, just when in innumerable churches the Three Hours' Service was commencing, that we stood finally in the barrack-square in full field-service marching order, weighed down by what we carried.

We were all very tense with emotion, and our hands shook comrades' hands in Good-b'ye with a regularity and continuity that only a practised demagogue leaving the platform could do well. Tears stood in many eyes. We knew, however, that it was an ordeal for the nerves of the affections, and steeled ourselves to think of other things, as we stood there, and be hard. But after the Colonel of the regiment had inspected us there was a greater trial, when the marching order was given, and our stability upon the barrack-square gave way to motion toward France. Then the regimental band in all its brazenness blared out its melodies :

If the Sergeant drinks your rum,
Never mind !

and the rest. And the civilian population, with the women we knew, flung itself upon us, scattering flowers and kisses, shouting and halloing, or gently sobbing and hurrying to keep step with us. Beads of perspiration rolled down brows

and cheeks, our close hair on our heads rose with excitement. Men wreathed their Service hats with primroses. Girls and wives were inside the ranks walking arm-in-arm with their soldier-boys. A mother held out her baby at arm's length for the soldier-father to kiss, and all the while the band ahead of us blasted away in quick-time—and then the band gave way more happily to the pipes, as all our pipers in gorgeous array took up the slogan and played us to the train. The populace was rolled back by the police, our ranks restored in all their brightness and sparkle, and every man's rifle seemed to be at the same angle across his left shoulder. So in a fine strapping style, all together and with one step, we entered the stern confines of the terminus where the troop-train was waiting, marched past a large draft of silent Gordon Highlanders with aprons over their kilts, and past a draft of Dorsets to the far end of a long platform.

We were soon in the train, and then the civilians were allowed to us once more, and then the last tender farewells and embraces. Then the official farewell of the C.O. "Good-b'ye and spare none!" and then the cry, "All aboard!" and then, "We're off, boys!"

And the train rolls slowly out.

Fitz opposite me looked frantic with excitement. "I kill every German I see," says he.

H—, the American boy who wanted to charge with the Guards, put his head out of the window and yelled at every station we passed

through in order to get a responding yell from astonished civilians, who nevertheless understood what it meant—reinforcements going into the great battle.

“I’ll never come back,” says another, silent and morose.

“Well, whatever happens,” says another, “we’ve had a splendid send off.” And we all agreed with him.

We found ourselves on Easter morning on the slope of a heaven-kissing hill, covered with innumerable tents. The sun shone fair over France. We were at the Base Camp, and mingled with a vast concourse of new drafts of every regiment of Britain. We were there in strength, but there were also large batches, in some cases a thousand strong, from the other national regiments that drilled with us at Little Sparta and had been brought up in the same ways. Not a few recognised me. I had had all the recruits at Little Sparta collected one night in the Grand Pavilion for a lantern lecture with pictures of things I had heard and seen in foreign parts. In London, except at the Bombing School, the five regiments had been separated, but now representatives of each of us, Bill-Browns, Jocks, Micks, Taffies, and Coalies, were present—English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh—and we belonged to one division and would henceforth be more often together, one being the relief of the other in the field, or neighbour on the

right or left, or behind in support. We were a Britain in ourselves.

We heard fantastic rumours, unchecked by newspaper reports: the first that the Germans had entered Arras at eight o'clock that morning, then that our division as a whole had been lost and that we would have to take its place for the time being, then that the Germans had broken through at La Bassée. A Labour man told a group of us that the French had surrounded 500,000 Germans.

“With what?” we asked in amusement.

“With 30,000, eh?”

One thing was certain: the great battle still raged, and we should be thrown into it to turn the scale.

We comforted ourselves with a great deal of *naïveté* in the presence of old soldiers and listened to almost any tale; we inspected the German prisoner camps from a distance and criticised the largeness of their rations; we ate our own bully-beef with relish and confessed it wasn’t “half-bad”; we also ate the army biscuits without complaint, and, besides our bully, at every meal we ate a great number of Germans. My blood was rather curdled by the atrocities we committed in advance and in imagination on fleeing or prostrate enemies when we got them in our power.

“All that you can do to them they can also do to you,” said I. “And when you talk of being merciless when you have the Germans in your power, remember that just now it is chiefly

British soldiers which he has in his power." But my companions did not go into battle with the Golden Rule embroidered in their crest. They went out to be terrible to the enemy, to be drastic, to put the fear of death into him.

• However, with all our bravado and tall talk we had also the consciousness of going to sacrifice. We talked of killing, but thought more in our hearts of the possibility of being killed. The tragedy of leaving wife or sweetheart, home, parents, and to perish perhaps within a week was still the note to which we were attuned.

Then our orders came quickly to the Base Camp, and even still more laden—for we now carried ammunition and a blanket as well as all the rest of the stuff which we had brought from England—we took the road back to Havre, there to entrain. It took us a long time to march a short distance, and every time we halted and sat down the weight of the stuff on our shoulders pulled our backs down, so that we lay on it and sprawled out with our legs. What a relief that ten minutes in the hour gave us, what a pleasure it afforded ! It was strange to notice how much recuperated we were when the order came to resume our way. So we sludged along French roads singing any sort of song, glad to have anything that might make us forget for a moment the burden of Europe on our shoulders.

At Havre we were put into a train. Not into the cattle-trucks we had been led to expect, but into the poky third-class carriages of a ramshackle passenger-train. It was a great crush,

and how we squeezed in our equipment as well as ourselves it would be difficult to say. Plenty of army food was handed to us, and in a short while the whole lot of us were pottering to and fro with mess-tins making tea, and afternoon passed to evening in great gaiety. It was many hours before the train crawled out—the train which was going to the Front cautiously feeling its way at five miles an hour, and always waiting for army orders before it halted or proceeded.

The movement in the train stirred something in ourselves. It was a very slow progress—nothing to alarm—but it meant : *We—are—getting—nearer.* It hushed the noisy thought ever such a little, and related each one of us for a moment to home and his loved ones, for the thread that was between us and home was being extended. It was tugging a little at heart-strings.

Night set in and we settled ourselves as best we could, lying against or half on top of one another. The boy next to me lay on the floor under our feet. No one knew the point we were destined for, not even our officers sitting in the second-class. “It may be like this,” said a sergeant: “the train will stop in a field and we’ll all have to bundle out without our packs and go straight into action ; or the train may be struck by a shell, and we may have to get out with our entrenching tools and entrench a position in a wood or on the ridge of a ploughed field. We might then get surrounded by the enemy and have to fight our way through.”

There were many suggestions, which increased, especially when the train passed into the city of Amiens and we began to hear the commotion of the battle. But from Amiens we did not approach nearer to the fray, but passed away northward into quieter country, where not a whisper of a shell was heard, slowly, slowly.

We could not sleep, for we were in a neurotic and excited state. Mixed with us were many old campaigners, who told their stories of hair-breadth escapes and advanced theories of military behaviour. "I'm a one-man soldier," a Welshman in front of me kept saying. "I'll do what I'm ordered to do. I won't do more, but I won't do less."—"Ah, I'd always look after a chum, I would," says another soldier.

Then the talk gives way to endless songs. And as we again near the zone of destruction we feel that tiredness, pain, death, though more or less distasteful, can nevertheless be viewed indifferently. Only one thinks of the loved one at home and what it may mean to her. But we are in God's hand and His are our destinies. We are fighting in a good cause and "*can do no other.*" If we die, humanity must do for us all that we would do for her.

Huddled up in a dark corner of the carriage a-thinking of many such occasions in life when I have parted for the unknown, listening to the soldiers' tales, it recalled the mood of Clarence's dream when he was pacing on the hatches of the ship at night with the Duke of Gloucester, talking of the Wars of the Roses. The garment

of destiny was woven of the substance of the dream.

There were no lights in the carriage except that given by a guttering candle which kept spilling its grease ; toppling over now and then, and having to be relit. The pale gleams showed the faces of the soldiers, and they looked more gentle than by day.

“ How long will the war last ? ” asked one. “ Five years, perhaps,” some one replies. But it was not the years ahead but the present moment that was affecting the soldiers’ souls. It was an epic moment for every man who had not gone to the Front before.

The war had become the condition of our living. Every one had got to make the war his life. But it was not really life. Perhaps it was not so important as we thought. Still, it was a test of the heart. It was marvellous to feel ordinary working men brought from the vulgarity and materialism of modern life to the reality that is only tenderness. If only distant London folk could have heard this slow midnight train creeping toward the war, its songs all turned tender and real, if they could see the bright eyes ! And at about one in the morning the whole train seemed to be singing “ Home, Sweet Home ! ” though no matter what song they sang, however vulgar, something in their tones robbed it of vulgarity.

“ I suppose there must be some of us who will never return,” said one to me.

“ Yes, that’s inevitable, I suppose.”

"But they say that if you're killed your spirit goes home first."

"Yes, it's possible to return more quickly than one expects that way."

"But do you believe it?"

"It seems true," I answer. "It is a poetical thought, and poetry is always nearer the truth than prose. A shell blasts the life out of you, and you go straight to the presence of the one who is nearest to you."

"Straight to the bosom of your beloved," I would have said to myself.

The candle went irreparably to waste and guttered out at last, and we were left in complete darkness; for the windows of the carriage had been taken out and sheets of iron put in the frames instead of glass. With the darkness came also silence, long silence, and the train waiting hours, as it seemed, and then creeping cautiously on a mile, to wait again. We lay or lounged or sprawled in uncomfortable positions, and we thought, each man by himself. Some men remained pessimists in the darkness, some optimists, some morbid, others serene. And the serenity of the last emerged like a perfect night sky out of clouds in space—our faith!

Daybreak was murky, and the dull day showed us a more desolate country, scarred by the upturned clay of new breastworks, and in the grey sky we looked eagerly at rings of smoke of shrapnel, and of high explosive. The

detonation of the war reached our ears. We watched many Red Cross trains go past—one way empty, the other way with their precious freight of wounded sons of our country.

Only in the late afternoon did we come to our particular railhead. By that time the clouds had cleared, and a lively breeze with fresh sunshine blew over the grass-covered ridge where we bivouacked. We were rejoiced to get out of the filthy, crowded train, and we made our evening meal with the greatest merriment and happiness.

Our progress to the line was in stages. In the first stage we marched with many songs to the wet camp of B—, where we bivouacked on the long wet grass and listened to the thunder-storm bombardment and the clangour of German attempts to break through. Though we had not come to the battle-centre, we had nevertheless reached the vicinity of the greatly extended German advance.

We lay close to one another to keep warm, slept by fits and starts, and thought and dreamed of what Fate might have in store. We ate corned-beef and biscuits in the morning ; we tried to keep clean despite the rivers of mud ; we were paraded and sworn at and dismissed, and visited the village graveyard where so many bodies of brave soldiers lie—and all the time we thought about Fate. All about us swarmed French-Canadians, jabbering in their French patois. They had lost a chaplain, killed by a shell, and the body lay in state in the village church. It was

a moving spectacle to see crowds of soldiers on their knees on the reversed chairs of this Roman Catholic chapel, the candles burning beside the coffin up at the altar, the sentries standing on each side of it, motionless, with bayonets fixed.

Fitz, the Virginian, and Knock, a sailor boy who had been wounded at the Battle of Jutland and discharged from one service and conscripted into another, came in with me and knelt in the little chapel. After that we wandered a great deal about together. One of our quartermaster-sergeants was killed ; we saw wounded men, walking wounded come down the line to the dressing-station. Battle thunders rolled toward us and called us over the mud to the line.

Then our caps were all taken away from us and put into old sacks.

“ You will get them back when you come out of action,” we were told. “ Now you’ll wear your steel helmets.”

At the bottom of the sacks are many shabby, grubby caps.

“ Whose caps are these ? ” we ask.

“ They are the caps of the dead—of the men who have not come back to claim them.”

We go to the battalion painter. He paints the regimental crest on every helmet. We shall be distinguished even in the battle-line.

The next stage is the march to the reserve lines in darkness and rain, a more or less silent trudge through the mud. The men are not so heavily equipped now ; packs have been left behind, but what remains on the soldiers’ back

is heavy enough in all conscience. After a lull in the bombardment the guns take up the tale again, and evil gun-flashes rise out of the horizon ; the war-dragon blinks his envious eyes on the living. His terrible voice resounds and echoes over the desolated country. The draft is halted near a shattered village, halted again at a village which is flat. Shell-holes are on all sides and confusion indescribable. What is this strange field, with its tumbled stones and iron posts ? It is the cemetery of what was once a large and thriving French settlement, a place which is still marked large on the map, but has ceased to exist. The iron posts are Catholic crosses : they are the only memorials which have withstood the effects of shrapnel ; they point at all angles, and the Christs on them are more or less riven and broken again. There is a dull odour—it is that of the dead, even of the old dead, for the shells were but recently tearing up the graves again.

Red lights go up, great red flares, lighting up one half of the night sky, showing the faint contours of grey clouds and the wanlesses and darknesses of a rainy heaven, reflecting also on the faces of the men. All of us look a little strained, a little tired.

Then the wan body of men go on, leaving the village behind, and plunge unevenly on the broken, rutty road, by which in all seasons the rations-carts plod every night to take the food to the men in the line. No civilisation is in front, but only endless barbed-wire, shell-holes,

debris, dud shells, trenches. Shells come hurtling through the air, some give a long intense screech, others, seeming to have plenty of time, come chattering idly through the sky, but all crash and grumble in disjection with groan of fast-travelling fragments of cast-iron. The gas-shells sneak through the air and go off like wet fireworks. All ranks are wearing gas-masks at the alert, and we pass through the sweetish, sickly odour of spent gas from shells that fell in the morning ; it is harmless. Nevertheless one shell does come on the track, and explodes beside the courageous old fellow from the Far West. He has no time to adjust his gas-mask on his head, and he gets the gas and falls out—goes back, the first casualty among my friends.

There is a further halt, and as the tired reinforcements rest, the moon comes out of the clouds. A party of men passes with rifles slung, putties torn, trousers and tunic and equipment smothered in mud, faces pallid, haggard, tired. They are men who are coming out of the battle-line. They are going down to rest, and they have not a word to say. Silently, heavily, steadily they march down and past—the men of whom all men talk, England's guardians, the keepers of the line. They pass, and our fellows go on. In ten minutes more the new draft is in the mud and the chalk of the reserve lines at B—— and the reinforcements have taken their place.

VI

THE SPIRIT OF THE BATTALION

A CERTAIN literary bent being descried in me, I was asked by one of our officers, who by his enthusiasm and care for the men was the life and soul of his unit, to look through the battalion records, edit them where necessary, and endeavour to supplement them by stories of the fighting gleaned from the men. This gave me, as it were, a sort of roving commission among the ranks, and whilst remaining a private soldier I obtained the rare privilege of being able to approach any one, from lance-corporal to brigadier, without the soul-freezing formalities of being marched to this one and marched to that. It gave me a unique opportunity, by which I profited, though many of those brilliant young writers who perished in the war would, no doubt, have profited more and have written a more stirring story at the end. I think of Chesterton and "Saki" and Brooke and Thomas and the rest.

In London we had been with the reserve battalion. In France we joined a proud fighting battalion made up of men each of whom had his own story of the fighting and of war-terror.

There were still a goodly number of 1914 men, but as many or more of the other years of the war as well. The battalion was a thorough mixture of men of all frays and men of all experiences, and it goes without saying it was *fier comme un écossais*, it was justly proud of what it had done and justly awed because of the number of its dead.

The battalion belonged originally to the "immortal" Seventh Division, and was brought from garrison duty in Egypt upon the outbreak of war. After a short course of special training in the New Forest, it was taken across the Channel and thrown into the scale in Flanders. The transport on which they sailed for Bruges Bay was not in any way memorable itself, but it was a sort of Argo by virtue of the flower of manhood which it had on board. The officers were brave young men of noble families, who knew in behaviour and act the meaning of *noblesse oblige*, the men whom they designed to lead were the seasoned veterans of the old "contemptible little army." They were rushed forward to save Antwerp, or to save the retreating Belgian Army, and then rushed back to Ypres to save themselves and the line, but within three weeks of their landing on the Continent, nearly all the fighting officers and three-quarters of the rank and file were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. At the First Battle of Ypres the commanding officer himself surrendered to the enemy, and the second in command, the hero of all the soldiers under him, was shot dead. Here the

war in all its dumbounding novelty and its nightmare of chances of death and suffering disclosed itself. The "professional" soldiers little knew when, at an immature age, they signed on for long terms of years of service, that the future held in it such an ordeal, such a confrontation of horror, such a massacre. Else the callow boy who signed away his freedom for the glamour of a uniform might have paused. This was something vastly different from trouble in Matabeleland or mowing down the Fuzzy-Wuzzy in his home in the Soudan. It was no longer the hopeless valour of the Dervish with his spear *versus* the hopeless efficiency of the machine-gun, but with a sort of poetic justice it was machines *versus* machines. It might even fairly be argued that in 1914 the machines opposing us were better than those we held ourselves, and that relatively we were now in the position of the less scientific and educated tribes of the world, and were up against a race who had better machinery for killing men than we had. A devastating thought! And, despite the discipline of our Spartan originals in the battalion, there was a good deal of excusable stupefaction which might even be called by a more unkind name by the ruthless military mind. The First Battle of Ypres was a frantic ordeal. The glory of the battalion lies in the terror of these days and nights in which it was destroyed and in the ever-memorable losses in officers and men, a new type of glory in the British Army, one which was born of suffering and losses rather

than one born of the joy in causing losses to the enemy.

After the battle the numbers were made up by fresh drafts of men from England, more old soldiers, for the volunteers were not trained yet. These in turn suffered untold privations in the first rainy winter of the war, in the worst trenches the army ever saw. There were no capacious dug-outs and comfortable sand-bagging, but our "seasoned" veterans, with the sun of Egypt deep in their flesh, came from the warmth and drought of Cairo to the frost and penetrating damp of an improvised system of trenches. They were not infrequently flooded out, they had no duck-boards, none of the military civilisation which was developed in later years. I have no doubt many a vital string of men's constitutions was snapped that winter, though that sad event meant much more to the man personally than it did to his place in the army. Men whose health was lost had to fight on in patience equally with those who kept well. The army could not afford to go sick.

In December 1914 the battalion took part in an abortive night-operation, in which it suffered heavily, sowing No Man's Land with its dead. Something great might have come of it had all gone well on every hand, but the "best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley." The attack was well conceived from the attackers' point of view, but, as became usual in later stages of the war, our executive imagination stopped short of the enemy's designs. The

German lines were reached, the Germans met us adequately, parties were lost in the dark, parties perished, parties were left behind, and in the end the survivors on both sides were back in their wet holes, conscious of the green bundles, which once were men, lying unrecovered in the dangerous waste between the lines.

The first Christmas came, and with it the unofficial armistice, when British and Germans met and interchanged courtesies where but lately they had fought, and our Tommies exchanged souvenirs with Fritz, and we buried our dead and ate Christmas pudding and wondered of home. At that time there was a rumour as if the armies of both sides might ultimately refuse to fight, and the politicians be left to settle the war as best they might without any more shedding of innocent blood. This possibility never found much favour, however, in authoritative circles, and soon orders were sent out to discourage fraternisation and to encourage a greater spirit of hate. A year later a Staff officer took up his unwonted abode in the trenches on Christmas Eve to see to it that the instructions against making friends with the enemy were carried out.

Nevertheless, there was probably little chance of such an ideal consummation of the war as a peace by mutual consent of rank and file, though it was thought the war might be over by Easter 1915, or at the latest by Michaelmas ; there was, as we all know now, a long and bitter stupid reckoning to make on both sides before the game was to be thrown up.

The battalion went into all the bloody adventures of 1915—Neuve Chapelle and Festubert and Loos and Hohenzollern Redoubt—and was reinforced repeatedly from the large and gallant body of Kitchener's men. Instead of being a time of ending and of winning, it was a time of making and consolidating. The British Army was being hammered into shape. The new discipline, the only discipline fitting for the new stress of war, was being introduced. That Prussianism which had obtained currency in the continental governments—that “the army is founded on the death-penalty ; remove the death-penalty and the fabric of the army falls to pieces”—was gaining practical hold of the mind of the new army builders. The year 1915 saw probably the greatest number of cases of capital punishment in the war. For offences which seem slight enough to the civilian intelligence, and indeed to the intelligence of the civilians in khaki, many were shot, and appalled regiments heard so often the terrifying volley at dawn and knew that another weaker brother had paid the price of efficiency. A man shot does not help to fight the foe ; could he not have been sent to the base to do clerical work or into a labour battalion to mend the roads ? Would he not at least have helped a little in these capacities, though by temperament he be no use as a fighting man ? The army answer would be : He had to be shot as an example. If we let him go, others would play the coward and so save their skins. But if we shoot him, every man knows

what is likely to be his fate if he fails at his post. He knows also that the army has absolute power over him, and that it is not the least use rebelling or mutinying or endeavouring in any way to oppose his puny strength to its complete power.

It is greatly to the credit of our regiment that in the whole of the war it only lost one man who was sentenced to death by court-martial and shot. Nevertheless, I suppose the fate of that one man showed to what an extent it has been sought to found the discipline of the army upon fear. Private X was shot for cowardice. It was after the battle of Neuve Chapelle, and the sentence was procured largely upon the evidence of a certain dour sergeant-major, who himself was killed not long afterwards by a German shell. The spirit of the army finds its most practical expression in the non-commissioned man. He has no imagination, or if he had it when joining the army, he generally puts it away and becomes a subordinate limb of the body-politic of the army. The brain of the army works through him. The men hated Sergeant-Major Y for his doing to death of the private in his company. The company was mortified beyond words at the imputation of cowardice to any one in its ranks, and felt that they in a way were disgraced by the sentence. They therefore swore a sort of oath of comradeship to redeem their name at the next battle. They would fight on, no matter at what cost, and never surrender themselves, and take no prisoners. Every man was to win a virtual V.C. And they did make an extra-

ordinary fighting display some weeks afterwards at Festubert—one-half of the company died fighting, earning for itself the title of the “Immortal Eighty.” The papers at home resounded with their praise, and several poets of the battalion have written verses concerning the occasion. The battalion has had many poets, good, bad, and indifferent. Extraordinary how fighting and rhyming go together. Most of the poets were uneducated, and, like Byron, did not care for grammar at a push, but they were in nowise deterred.

Bayonets lunge—and gory red return on guard again,
As many a coward, tyrant Hun falls numbered with the slain.
For all that stern and rugged field was drenched with blood
that day
By men who'd rather bleed and die than go the coward's way,
writes one.

They close again, a smile is on each brow,
Ye Gods ! is not this valour sans compeer ?
Death, Glory, Life clasp hands together, now
'Tis over, and they are gone, and foemen murmur, How ?
writes another.

I was much interested in the stories of the shooting of Private X and the subsequent heroism of the immortal eighty. Every man who belonged to the time had something to tell of his impressions—all sentimentalised the poor private soldier and made a hero of him, and equally sentimentalised the sergeant-major, making of him the villain of the melodrama. Here is my impression taken from the men.

There is a tavern in Laventi where a bygone Derby winner is supposed to have been born, and an old race-horse called Calais was still to be seen when our men were there in 1915. It had had its day and won its corn. Over the bar where the beer and *vin rouge* are served was a life-size pattern of a horse worked in the wall in coloured bricks. In this tavern there would break out characteristic rags upon occasion, when the officers quartered upstairs would begin aiming butter at one another, pouring champagne down one another's necks, breaking the furniture, and so rousing the Belgian women who slept in the cellars below. It was at this tavern that the immortal eighty used to meet, and here they vowed never to take any prisoners or to surrender, no matter to what extremity they might be reduced in battle. The misanthropic sergeant-major had his meals at this tavern, and after the recent court-martial and subsequent execution of Private X at dawn, he had become a shunned man. He was felt to be doomed, and it was as if the brand of Cain had come out on his brow, and he too seemed to know in some sort of way that a German shell was waiting for him. He himself belonged to the same company as the Immortals, but he was one of the sort who never miss an opportunity of doing you harm, of working against you and getting you punished. He sat apart, and Private A, sitting among the Immortals, rather a character in his way, would glance over at him in the midst of the potations

and whisper impressively to his comrades the lines of Burns :

Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.

So it was at Festubert. Quite early in the fray Sergeant-Major Y got a shell to himself, and he lay on the battle-field in mortal agony, and no one would give him a drink of water, though he kept asking for it. Some even spat on him as they marched past. The immortal eighty, to whose company, as I have said, both X and Y belonged, went by, went, indeed, too far and were surrounded, fought to the very last man, and their bodies and those of their foes, pinned by their bayonets, lay in heaps together in No Man's Land. The army retired, and no one was able to bring the bodies in and bury them. But night-parties went out months later to search among the dead for valuable papers and maps which had been in possession of one or other of the sergeants, and they found sodden masses of decay and skeletons full of flies, which, when the corpses were disturbed, came fluttering out in clouds, even in the darkness of night.

O would that I had seen them lying there !
wrote Henderson Bland in the *Graphic*,

A dauntless few amid the German dead
With twisted bayonets and broken rifles spread,
Let some one mark the place whereon they fell,
And hedge it round, for in the after-time
Their fame will draw the many who would dwell
Upon those deeds that made an hour sublime.
I hear them shouting there, "Surrender ! Never !
Take the last cartridge here—Scotland for ever !"

Y's body was, I believe, found, and buried with due ceremony, and a "decent" cross, with name and rank printed thereon, was raised above it. It is in one of those military cemeteries behind the lines where each dead man abides in his rectangle and even ranks are maintained. But the eighty are become "lonely soldiers," with blank crosses, because nobody knows them, or can tell one from another, friend from foe. They are one in death, as they were in life. Their heroism was a matter of *esprit de corps*, and Y, had he lived, would probably have blamed them for going too far, for he was a believer in a discipline to which *esprit de corps* should always be subservient. A fine *esprit de corps* and a discipline founded on fear will, however, often clash. It was so in the attitude of the men towards the shooting of Private X.

The court-martial and this execution, which seemed to bring the curse on Sergeant-Major Y, and made him finally hated, was occasioned by a circumstance in the battle of Neuve Chapelle. It should be explained that in those days shell-shock was not a recognised type of casualty. The presumption is that X was suffering from it ; a shell had burst near him and left his brain in a dazed condition. For he was one of the bravest boys in his company, and at the same time one of the most eager. He was lost sight of in the battle, did not turn up when the men were rearranged in their ranks and marched away, but straggled in later, and was unable to give an account of himself. Sergeant-Major Y accused

him of cowardice in the face of the enemy and intention to desert, and had him placed under arrest at once. Y, through army training, had become the sort of man who presented every fault in the worst possible light, and he was capable of pursuing a case with persistent malevolence. During the time of his authority he got many men greater punishment than would normally have been thought due, or than could have been expected, blackening and accusing men when brought before their officers. The case against X was the crown of this course of action. It had often procured extra pain, fatigue, and sickness for men in his company, but in this case it obtained for him a young man's death.

In the light in which Sergeant-Major Y construed X's conduct, and the absence of explanation on the part of X, the Colonel saw the matter in a very serious light, and decided it was not one he could himself settle suitably, and the case was set down for district court-martial. Afterwards, when the matter had been discussed considerably in the battalion, opinion changed somewhat in X's favour, and Y, on whose evidence the boy's life depended, was given the hint to soften things down at the trial. Y, however, was not a relenting type, and insisted on his personal opinion that X had displayed cowardice, and that the discipline of his company would go to bits if such behaviour were allowed to pass without exemplary punishment. The judges were men of another regiment; they took the sergeant-major's word as against Private X's obscurely written, verbose

defence. X was found guilty, and sentenced to be shot. He was the only man before or since who in this crack regiment in this war has suffered the extreme penalty.

What the regiment has done in the war cannot easily be set down in words. It has gone into the midst of terrible slaughter many times. In recruits it has consumed six times its original number. When the roads have been full of a disorganised rabble they, with a few kindred regiments, have alone been found facing the other way, and going to avenge dishonour and defeat. The regiment was proud of itself. How it stomached the humiliation of having one of its members shot may be imagined.

From the moment the sentence was known a new note prevailed in the battalion. The men were not in the trenches, but in the shine and sparkle of a resting-time behind the lines. Sternness increased. N.C.O.'s grew angrier and harsher. The artificial bawls of the parade-ground were more intolerable than ever. Drill, which should be a pleasant thing, was terrible and straight and merciless, as if each man were being tried for his life. Nothing flattering was once said to a platoon or company ; but instead, frowning displeasure reigned.

X was seen by the chaplain, who found him quite cast down because of the disgrace, but angry because it would come to his father and mother also that he had been shot for cowardice. The compassionate minister thought to fortify him to meet death, but that matter did not seem

to trouble the prisoner in the least. They knelt down and prayed a little together in the quiet of the informal prison. "Don't be too miserable about it," said the padre. "They were hard on you. Though you've been condemned, it doesn't necessarily mean that you deserve to die. You've been made an example of for the good of the army as a whole. We've got to beat the Huns ; it's a terrible ordeal, we all know, but every one must be made to feel that it's impossible to escape death by running away."

There was a pause ; the minister asked if he had any doubts in his mind about salvation.

"You don't expect me to forgive my enemies?" asked the boy.

"Not if they are Prussians," said the chaplain staunchly.

"Well, I don't forgive Sergeant - Major Y," said he. "And what's more, he won't be long following me. My case isn't settled yet."

"Ah, I'm afraid there's no appeal, my poor lad," said the comforting parson, "unless you mean on the other side, where I've no doubt if there's anything wrong it'll all be tried over again."

Sergeant-Major Y, however, was harsher than ever. But there was a marked coldness towards him, even among those of his own rank. The time of execution was fixed for Friday at dawn, the whole battalion to be on parade to witness the same.

Reveille was an hour earlier than usual, and the men dressed in the dark. They were to be

in full fighting order, with their packs on their backs. Private X and his guards dressed also, and he alone was in "walking-out attire." He had spent a good night, and was calm, even cheerful. During the preliminaries of ranging the battalion around three sides of a square and fixing places for C.O. and adjutant and other officers, X was comparatively free, and he talked with several of his old companions, and said "Good-bye," very happily and calmly.

Volunteers had, I believe, been asked for, out of the battalion, to shoot him, or the idea of volunteers had been mooted. For of course if X had really disgraced the regiment it would have been easy to find volunteers. But volunteers could not be obtained in this case, and so the battalion snipers were ordered up to make a firing-party.

"Don't miss ! Fire right through my heart," said X to them. Then he asked for a cigarette, lit it, and strolled easily and politely across the green to the tree against which he would be shot. He did not wish to have his eyes bandaged, but in that he was overruled. The battalion, with arms at the slope, stood to attention, the snipers stood and loaded. The victim, with the white bandage over his eyes and feet and hands tied, stood against the tree. Pale dawn light of mist crept over the scene of punishment, encroaching on horizons and making the scene of punishment the world itself for a moment.

The military police took charge of the whole ceremony, and then in the tensity a perfectly

dressed sad officer read the sentence, and then up went the rifles to firing position. "Good heavens, they are going to shoot him!" The idea dawns on those of dull imagination. There is scarcely a dry eye in the battalion. Captain C, who is X's company commander, looks to be in a terrible state of nerves. Popular Jimmy, the R.S.M., is melancholy beyond words. Vigilant police in the background are keeping strangers away from the scene. Then *zupp*, *zypp*, *pp*, *crash*, the ten shots are fired all at once, and X falls dead.

Captain C on his horse wheels about and suddenly takes charge of the whole battalion. "Order arms, unfix bayonets, form fours left, quick march!" And the men with their officers march out on a long route-march, leaving the limp fallen body behind at the foot of the tree.

And not a man has mutinied. Such is the force of the discipline. The mutiny has only been in the heart.

Y, however, remains a marked man. And he sits alone in the tavern of the horse. A special shell is waiting for him, stacked for the time being in a German ammunition dump, but coming into action in the early part of the battle of Festubert. His company, uncowed by discipline, gain—"through death immortal fame."

It is a matter of *esprit de corps*.

After Festubert a bombing company was formed, and this contained all the worst characters

in the battalion, the intractable spirits. It was in charge of a dare-devil young officer, and he loved these bad characters and proved them one and all to be heroes. If any sergeant-major could not manage any one in his company, he had to send him along to the "Suicide Club," where he was at once welcomed. And the bombing company practised hard with fearful and wonderful bombs, which caused as much terror to friends as to foes.

The regiment then marched to Loos, where every one blundered but the soldier did as he was told. On the road the battalion spent a whole day marching in a circle, and one soldier was heard to exclaim in undying phraseology: "I don't mind dam-well fighting and I don't mind dam-well marching, but this being damned about all the dam time's what damns me." And we arrived late, late, at Loos, when for twenty-four hours the Germans could have broken the line if they'd only known there was nothing in front of them. The kiltie lads lay asphyxiated in gas, the supporting division was in indescribable rout and confusion, and then at last a string of our splendid Spartan battalions was let loose at the foe, and swept into action with a verve and a style that are never to be forgotten.

After Loos the bombers had their great show, when between dawn and breakfast-time something like 18,000 bombs were flung upon the Germans in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, and the bad boys who formed the bombing company were all killed or wounded, and the teaching of bombing

was proceeding with novices in the trenches whilst the actual fight was going on. Never did any one see so many dead at any time in the whole war as in the foreground of this terrible redoubt. The shadows of the crowds of the dead invaded men's consciousness, and left in not a few a lasting sadness and melancholy which even victory could not cure.

Death, moreover, had eaten deep into the battalion by now, and had taken from each man friends, acquaintances, men he admired, men he disliked. The colours of the regiment were kept unfrayed, unsoiled in London, but the human colours, the body and soul of the regiment, were torn and ragged, crimson, blood-stained, scorched with the fire of battle, bleached by the death-dealing odours.

In the winter of 1915 the battalion was sent to Calais and to its frosty shores and brutal pleasures for a rest—one of the hardest times of all its sufferings, when the men lived in open tents on a snow-swept, icy shore. And then the battalion went to guard the ruins and the battle-lines of Ypres. Because it had defended Ypres in October 1914 upon first coming out and had had such a tragic and heroic history there, it saw the ruins with some emotion. In course of time the battalion even began to associate itself specially with the little town, as if it alone were the protector of it. In how many other regiments has not a similar sentiment prevailed ! Ypres in its ruins came to be regarded as a sort of spiritual treasure of the British Army. "Oh,

I think I'd shoot myself if Ypres were taken," said a blaspheming old soldier to me, the sort of man you'd say would do nothing for an ideal. "Ypres was the most beautiful little town you could ever wish to see at the end of a day's march," said another. Again our poets consecrated many thoughts and rhymes to Ypres.

From out the ruins I think I hear
The sleeping dead give one great cheer,

wrote our wonderful orderly of the C.O. I think he wrote a poem on every place and every fight in the war.

In the grim salient of Ypres we shed much blood ; wherever the battalion went it bled plentifully, and must have wasted away but for the new blood continually coming in. To many the time at Ypres was the most terrible in the war, but perhaps to all the most poetical. It was, nevertheless, despite the poetry, a marvellous relief when, late in the summer of 1916, the order came to march south, and our fighting-men left the grey zone of ruin and destruction and plunged into the peace and verdure of the France which was out of range of the shells. The unsullied greenery was sanctuary to the eyes. Virtues were discovered in the quiet French provincial folk that the men were confident did not exist in any Belgians. It was a long route-march, and at the end of it the concentrated horrors of the prolonged battle of the Somme. But the men did not look far ahead ; they were content to live in the present when the present

was good. The battalion were even then a strange mixture of men who had just come into the war, and men who had been more or less in all of it up till then. It marched in the sunshine and fresh air and followed the gay pipers, and no one more was killed for a whole month. For a while its life and its strength were stable, though each man knew as a matter that had become usual that here and there in this rank and in that men were invisibly marked for destruction later on, many were certain to disappear even within the very next month when they fronted the guns once more. What a life ! Happy they who have no imagination and no ever-articulating growth of thought ! They say the bad characters had generally a bad time in the war. But I imagine those who could think most suffered most, and the bad boys were generally pretty thoughtless. We had about that time one of the worst and bravest, the despair of officers and N.C.O.'s, who nevertheless got his worst offences and punishments forgiven him for his deeds of daring in time of action. During this progress from Ypres to the Somme he refused to march, and burnt his army boots. As a punishment the adjutant had him made a pair of sandals. He had to wear his gas-mask, and he was tied to a limber and dragged along. So he went most of the way to the Somme with these absurd goggles on his face and his bare feet in sandals. It did not make the least impression on his character, I am told. He was so wild the army had to get rid of him

at last. It could not tame him, and, tied to the tail-end of a limber, he was a symbol of the failure of old-fashioned discipline.

In the current sinister slang of the army, if the mortality was high at Ypres, the Somme, nevertheless, was not a health-resort. The autumn battles which gave us Grandecourt, Les Bœufs, and the rest were possibly the easier part of the ordeal. It was the winter in the bad Somme line of which the most terrible tales are told. How men stood by one another and endured the mud, the frost, the incessant bombardment makes us wonder at human endurance, will always make men wonder. Curious that in London, in Britain as a whole, the suffering should have been taken so much for granted, the heroic and splendid side always spoken of, the other denied, the cheerfulness of the men always affirmed as a sort of proof that conditions after all were not intolerable. Those soldiers, however, who went through the Somme campaign saw even in that enough, and would never desire of themselves to march another step or fire another shot. It was one vast chamber of gloom and horror.

As a holiday in '17 when the Germans had executed their retreat to the Hindenburg Line the men were taken from the Somme trenches and given the task of building the Peronne railway. It was navvies' work, but they took to it as if it were a task of the heart's dearest choice, so greatly was it better than the

mud and the frost and the shells of the line. After the railway they were sent to build an aerodrome, and only when that was accomplished were they given a genuine rest, something of a real change and a relief.

On April 12, with pipers playing, the battalion marched from Cléry to Peronne and from Peronne some five miles farther east, to what had once been the pleasant town of Cartigny, now the wilderness the Germans had left it when retreating to the Hindenburg Line. All that was left of what had once been a fair town was a mass of ruins, and when the battalion arrived in the snow and pitched its tents on the mud, the prospect was not cheerful. But it proved to be the prelude to a delightful holiday and a most unexpected development from the drudgery of the war.

The King's uniform covers a multitude of virtues and gifts, and there lurked in our battalion an unsuspected talent, which was presently to manifest itself in a surprising way, transforming the misery of Cartigny as by a fairy wand into the loveliness in which we left it. The *hidden hand*, I believe, was Armstrong's, for the joy of his life had been gardening, especially artificial gardening. In that mysterious state of life to which it had pleased God to call Armstrong, he was an artificial gardener on the estates of Lord B—— in Scotland, and his handiwork had upon occasion figured in photographic effect on the glazed surfaces of *Country Life*. He was the genius of Cartigny, and in his quiet, sweet way

wrought for beauty—one of the strongest men in the battalion, an expert wrestler, but also one of the most gentle, one of the few men in our careless, violent crowd who did not use bad language. Of course he found kindred spirits, and the other gardeners of the battalion shone out through their *camouflage* of khaki. “Gardeners camouflaged as soldiers,” I hear the hard voice of the R.S.M. a-saying. But before long every man had become a gardener, and was co-operating to work the miracle amid the ruins. And since they worked in mid-April, a month beyond the equinox, they had one greater than all co-operating with them, the great god of gardens breathing radiant life and energy over their bended backs.

The railway to Peronne is not yet absolutely perfect, and what is called “railway fatigue” will endure all the while the battalion is at Cartigny. The men will be employed in shifts, and there will be no drill or musketry or practice bombing—only a roll-call in the morning and the leisure time in the encampment. A bright idea comes to birth in the battalion—to make gardens.

All the men were on wood-fatigue to make bonfires, so as to get dry after the soaking march, and also, if possible, to dry up the mud on which our seventy-seven tents were pegged. There is not a Frenchman on the scene, not a sentry or a prohibited area, but without let or hindrance the ruins are at the disposal of the soldiers. It is not difficult to find wood. There is wood for the preliminary and trivial matter of fires to get

dry, but there is also wood to floor every tent, wood that can be used for all manner of building purposes, and brick also, and stone and iron. "The men will have to stir and make this place generally habitable," an officer is overheard to say to the sergeant-major; "if they can build a railway they can also build houses. What we require is an orderly-room, headquarters, officers' messes, a fitting habitation for you, my dear sergeant-major. . . ."

The news soon went along the lines of the tents, where the men, dry and warm, lay on the flooring which they had just put down, and a hum of joyful anticipation grew on it. They would not need to be driven towards that kind of work. It was just what every one instinctively craved—to make, to build, to create again, the reaction from the spirit of destruction.

Cartigny is on the river Cologne, which flows into the Somme at Peronne. The road runs parallel with the river, and the Germans have cut the river-bank extensively in order to produce a permanent flood. In this, however, they have proved unsuccessful, for the road still holds, and it is of the ruins at the entry to Cartigny that the Orderly Room and Right Half Mess are destined to be made.

In three days the Orderly Room, company and battalion messes, sergeants' mess, and cook-houses are all complete, and a really fine piece of work has been begun on a house of brick, with every convenience, for the C.O. and the adjutant. The Orderly Room, roofed with corrugated iron,

gated iron brought in a lorry from Cléry, stands on one side of the Peronne road. On the other is rising ground, which slopes sharply upward to where Headquarters Mess is being built. An army of bright boys from G Company is about to begin cutting steps in the bank, so that it may be easier for officers going up and down between Headquarters and the Orderly Room to do so, when a happy thought comes to some one: Why not bring a stairway from one of the ruined houses and fit it in? A large staircase is soon found, and removed intact from the house to which it belonged—the absence of two walls and roof had left the staircase nakedly exposed to view, and it was removed with very little difficulty. Fitting it into the cliff is more difficult. The earth has not only to be cut, but in places where it falls away too abruptly earth has to be supplied. At length the work is accomplished, and there is a polite wooden way from the Orderly Room up to the small tableland where Headquarters is rising out of the wreck of a farm-house.

There is a space of a few yards between the top of the staircase and H.Q., and, being continually trodden over, the grass begins to look shabby and wear through to the brown earth. This begets the second idea of Cartigny. The sun is now shining and the weather set fair. Why not a pathway of carefully arranged white bricks? That is done, and then Armstrong devises a few rockerries along the borders, "so that the place might not seem so bare." And he

begins to transplant from the gardens of the abandoned and ruined villas. He finds narcissus, pheasant-eyed narcissus, and tiger lilies. He never calls the latter tiger lilies, but always *tigrum lily*—by that you may know he is a gardener—and when he wants to tell you how and what he planted and arranged, he keeps making tiny circles in faint pencil on the paper before you. He finds auriculas and pansies and violas, transplants even a rose.

The officers, in all their perfection of glimmering brown boots, trip along the white bricks and up and down the wooden way, and as they see the formal garden grow it strikes them as fine. "By Jove, that's fine," says one; "could we not start the men making gardens all along their lines and round the messes?" The C.O. and the adjutant cast admiring glances at the work going on, and the former decides to offer prizes for the best gardens the various companies can produce, and he names a judging day far away in the loveliness of May. There ensues one of the most delightful springs of recent years, with unbroken sunshine and warm air, and Cartigny hums with work and happiness.

The plan of the encampment ought to be realised. There runs the pleasant little river, where every day the men bathe and where the pensive anglers sit, some with drawn threads from kit-bags and bent pins, others, such as the famous character Paddy K—, with veritable line and hook baited with worms for the timid little dace below, who probably did not realise

there was a war on till they saw the many khaki reflections in the water. Parallel with the little river runs the road going into the flattened town. There stands the Orderly Room. Opposite it runs the wooden stairway up the cliff to Headquarters Mess. Beyond the mess is the charming residence of C.O. and adjutant; at the back are cook-houses. These buildings are on the right of the white brick road; on the left are the pavilions of the various officers, each with its garden, and some way beyond them is Captain C—'s wonderful summer-house, brought intact from some once beautiful French garden. The young Guards' officers sitting about in deck-chairs give the idea that one is at some beautiful resort in the South. And what is pleasant luxury to them is the joy of life for the men.

Each company has marked out the pattern of its formal garden, each platoon has its special care. A platoon of A Company has enclosed a tent in a heart; a border of boxwood marks out the pattern of the heart—the plan is that the crimson of many blossoms shall blend to give a suggestion of passion and loyalty and suffering. Another platoon endeavours to embody in floral contrast the blended patterns of the regimental crest—the cap-star. Armstrong produces wonderful thistles, the green part of which he obtains by just cutting the pattern in his turf, and the blue heads by thickly sown lobelia. One thistle is on each side of his gentle rose. F Company makes an elaborate and ambitious figure, an imitation of the floral clock that is to be seen in

Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh. Each man has found or improvised trowel and basket, shovel or hoe. The bayonet is for ever in use, cutting lumps of chalk to right sizes, making holes in the earth, cutting and slicing wood. Petrol-tins with holes in the bottom serve as watering-cans. How eager the men are seeking the plants and then in watering and tending them. Cheerful water-fatigue parties are to be seen every evening going to and from the river.

Primroses and daffodils and narcissi are soon blossoming in plenty. Lilies followed, arums and Solomon's-seal, and then forget-me-nots, pansies and violas. At the same time the perfecting of the designs of stones and glass, bricks and chalk, goes on. Armstrong's rockeries become the wonder not only of the battalion but of our many visitors and guests in this time of qualified rest. The work also on the railway still goes on ; the garden is only the expression of a leisure which might otherwise have been spent in card-playing and noisy gregariousness. Each man on the railway knows he has something like a home to return to—those wonderful tents, some of these, too, camouflaged with hand-painted designs, and all of them named—"Auld Reekie," "The Hermit's Rest," "The Home from Home," "The Wigwam," "The Hotel Cecil," "Th' Auld House," and so forth, the names being sharply printed in white chalks outside. So on the ruins of Cartigny a new Cartigny is growing, the collective expression of soldiers' love of home, but, alas, the day of

judgement is soon at hand when the prizes will be given, and then, before the June sun shall look on the horizon, we must off to the wars again.

“ The inexperienced ones do not know which flowers to cut and which they ought to leave, ye see,” says Armstrong, “ and they haven’t chosen all their flowers to bloom on the right day. But those who know are more likely to be successful for that reason.” His thistles in any case are perfect on the judging day, but indeed all his works are so much apart in their skill and success that he is ruled out of the competition and has a prize to himself. Those who made the floral clock get first prize, and our right flank company with its heart comes second. The C.O. is sole judge and arbiter, and he says that he is delighted beyond words at what the men have done, and he thanks them.

What else happened in Cartigny? Why, innumerable little things. Another unit began building and fitting up a hospital in the neighbourhood. And, oh scandal! were not some of the new collapsible spring beds found in the tents of our intrepid gardeners? Did not the General make some very scathing remarks about Scotsmen? Be that as it may, our men in their digging came across a good deal of treasure-trove, things which the careful French had buried before fleeing in 1914, and they nearly always respected these finds and closed the earth over them again. That was not the case when a party of explorers came upon a cellar of champagne.

There was one night when the quartermaster was showing lantern-slides of battalion history, and Harry, one of the smartest fellows, came up from the champagne cellar and staggered past the lantern screen in front of the officers. The picture being thrown was one of a certain captain, who had been named the sand-bag king because of his terrible passion for sand-bagging in the trenches. Harry pointed to the figure, and ejaculated in a comic happy voice, "Three . . . million . . . sandbags," and the whole audience roared with laughter.

"Shut up, that man!" said a captain in front.

And he wandered down to a place among the men looking on.

No officer shared in that champagne. The men kept it for themselves with pardonable secrecy. I told the story of this wonderful find to an officer a year afterwards. "Dear me," said he, "how extraordinary! I don't think any of us had any notion that the men had found champagne in the course of their digging."

They had, though. But that was their secret.

The serene holiday at Cartigny ended with a Sports Competition, for the greatest encouragement was always given to all men to run and to jump and to surmount obstacles, to box, to wrestle, to play football, and the rest. There were races for the men and races for officers also, and then officers *versus* sergeants, and other amusing items. But the chief events were an open competition in wrestling and walking, and

Armstrong undertook to throw any man of any regiment inside of ten minutes, and our pet walker out-walked everybody else.

“Is there a war on?” one soldier asks of another at such festivals.

“Too true there is,” answers his companion with some grimness.

Soon the battalion returned to Ypres and fought at Pilkem Ridge, at Boesinghe, and other starting-points and halting-points of fatal memory, till late autumn, when it marched away to take large share in the winning of the Byng Boys’ victory at Bourlon Wood and to stop the rot of other units in which indiscipline had at last set in in the waste time before Cambrai.

There was a point when it was “touch and go” with British discipline, when in fact it had worn very thin. Then it was that in our regiment and in the brother regiments our Spartan training told. November Thirtieth, December the First, that bitter St. Andrew’s-tide of 1917 will always be remembered by the Guards. It was then they stopped the rot at Gouzeaucourt. After the ordeal of the Bourlon Battle they were “out to rest.” “They were sleeping,” as one story has it, “when a messenger came to say that the Germans had broken through. In less than an hour the whole division was up again and marching forth through Metz and Gouzeaucourt. One of the strangest sights of the war was the mob of panic-stricken infantry on one side of the road and the stubborn and

tenacious Guards marching past in the opposite direction to repair the breach.

Said an A.P.M. as they marched along,
"Get out of the road, you funk^g throng ;
They'll put to rights what you've done wrong
—The Guards Division !"

(And they did.)

There was never the slightest wavering among our boys — indeed they constituted some of the worst and most relentless enemies of the German Army in the great attempts at victory in the winter of 1917-18 and in the spring and summer of the year of victory.

In the great story of one battalion it may be seen that the accumulation of battles and of sufferings from month to month and year to year begets a spiritual atmosphere. Each new man posted to the battalion is posted to the historical and spiritual inheritance of the battalion also. The regiment has left its memorials in every place where it has been. There are its crosses in every military acre of God ; there are its dead, its lonely soldiers, buried in No Man's Land ; there are its lost dead too. He comes to new faces, hard eyes, set lips, patient jaws, faces that have *seen*, the faces of those who have killed many and lust to kill more, the lined faces of those who have been wounded and are still in the fighting ranks. The battalion gives him its style, its stamp and impression, and as he breathes the regimental air he swears the regimental oaths. The spirit, however, is born of many sufferings and endless patience.

VII

WAYS OF THINKING AND TALKING

THERE is a disparity between the splendour of the army and the manners, life, and ways of the individual soldiers. Because of the famous deeds and sacrifice of men the name of the regiment is whispered with awe. The march past in the streets thrills the heart with national pride. But look at a group of men off duty, with their caps off, so that you can see the narrow foreheads lined with suffering, the blank eyes, and the look of dwarfed mind in each ! Off parade the warriors are not only quite human—they are our familiar and much-criticised friends, the working men.

The social tradition of the old little army, however, prevails over them, and they do not desire to enter Unions and strike for higher wages, shorter hours. They think in the army way, and talk in the army way, and drink in the army way. The traditional nicknames are taken and given by them as of old, and the slang-expressions of the army, mingled with all the current Americanisms, are adopted. The volunteer or conscript whose name is Smith

becomes inevitably "Dusty Smith" and then "good old Dusty"; the man whose name is Clark becomes "Nobby Clark," and that also is infallible; Wood becomes "Timber Wood"; White becomes "Knocker White"; Wilson becomes "Tug Wilson"; Fraser, "Spot Fraser"; Weston, "Kidney Weston," and so on. And the bread is called "rooty," and the jam is called "pozzy," and the fat is "jippo," and the porridge is "burgu." The guard-room is the "spud-hole," and gaol is "clink." If you are looking smart you're looking "very posh." To have nothing to do is to "look spare." Redundant pieces of kit are "buckshee."

"You talk about doing a Jesus," says the cook.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Why, with all you fresh lot o' fellers," says he; and he goes on to explain that feeding the five thousand is nothing to what he is being asked to do.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I beg leave to speak, sir," says the culprit brought before his officer.

"Shut up," says the sergeant-major.

"What have you got to say?" asks the officer nonchalantly.

"I was going to say, sir, as how this wasn't altogether my fault."

"That will do," says the officer icily. "Two drills!"

"Fall in," says the sergeant-major.

If you quarrel with the prize-boxer of the battalion he'll tell you that he'll "batter yer

gums fer ye." If you tell him playfully that you'll batter his, he says solemnly, "No, you wouldn't, now. Not in Christ's creation."

Jesus Christ is very commonly brought into talk for emphasis.

"Jesus Christ couldn't escape punishment in this battalion."

An officer's servant is speaking: "Mr. A—— asked me to bring the polish up on his boots with heel-ball."

His crony replies: "If a man heel-balls boots for an officer out here, he wants something to do, I say. I wouldn't heel-ball a pair of boots for Jesus Christ."

"Oh, I don't suppose He'd ask you to," says the servant glumly.

Malapropisms abounded in common talk. The war was often referred to as a war of "irritation." One man thinks less of another because "he's done time for embellishment." When the influenza plague was at its worst, a young stretcher-bearer was put in charge of an isolation hospital into which our cases were led. "Fancy putting a young feller like that in charge," said one to me.

"As if he could di-agonise."

A recalcitrant was telling how he defied the officer. "I sez to him, 'I'm a private soldier, yes, but I'm a mother's son, same's you, and I refuse to submerge myself any more.'"

During the German advance on Château-Thierry and their frustrated efforts near Rheims, a comrade looked over my shoulder at the map in a copy of the Paris *Daily Mail*.

"Thank God, they haven't taken Epernay, that's where the Plinketty Plonk (*vin blanc*) comes from. That would have put the lid on it! And I see they haven't got Meaux; that's where the beer comes from, isn't it?"

The atmosphere of this war has had a good deal in common with the atmosphere of the other old wars on the Continent, and despite all the new-fangled machinery there was more similarity in conditions than most people have imagined. The drinking, the women, the gambling have been much the same in the old days, and men who were fairly decent in their home-life became curiously rakish as soldiers of the King. The soldiers talked in a different way. The public shibboleths were different, but the men pronouncing them meant the same thing. A wit of 1745 records the conversation of Tom the Grenadier and his friend Jack who lies in gaol:

Who should pass in martial Geer
 But swagg'ring Tom the Grenadier :—
 " Hollo!—now Thomas—what's the Crack ? "
 Cries Thomas—" Bad enough, Friend Jack :
 They say—(damn him!)—the Young Pretender
 Bids fair to be our Faith's Defender ;
 And that the Rebels have great Hope,
To bring in Charley and the Pope."
 Quo' Jack with lengthened rueful Face,
 " Good Heav'n forbid :—If that's the case
Our liberty is gone,—and we
 Must, *Frenchmen*-like, bear Slavery."
 " *Our Liberty!* " cries Tom, " *What's worse*,
A thousand Times a greater curse,
If the Pretender mounts the Throne
 Damme—Our dear Religion's gone."

The wit thinks it very ironical that the man in

gaol should prate of freedom, and that a Grenadier, of all persons, should be concerned about religion. Tom the Grenadier of 1745 would have fitted fairly well into the social life of the soldier in France in 1918. He would have been drinking the bad beer and cursing its quality, and his language would not have been more lurid than that of a Bill-Brown of to-day. He would have made as free with French feminine charm. He would have staked his poor wages on the cast of the dice as easily as then.

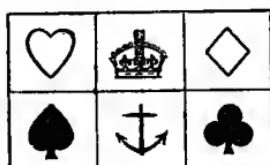
The atmosphere of Wellington's army was admirably reproduced in those tableaux from Hardy's *Dynasts* which we had in London some years ago. Hardy was proved somehow to have penetrated in his poetry to the eternal nature of the army.

That eternal nature was realised again in France, and possibly nothing was more characteristic than the widespread playing at dice and the game of Crown and Anchor. The same game, or versions of it, must have been played in the wars of Queen Anne and the Georges, and on the camping-grounds before Waterloo itself. When we were waiting for the transport, with men of all manner of other units in the great covered quay at Southampton, there must have been a dozen Crown and Anchor boards out, and eager crowds at each, and when we got to France nearly every estaminet had its game going on.

There is a board divided into six sections, each section marked with a different emblem :

The Heart.
The Crown.
The Diamond.
The Spade.
The Anchor.
The Club.

The man who owns the board has dice, which he rattles in a wooden dice-cup, and on each facet of the little bone cubes which he shakes is a representation of one of the emblems.



The owner ought to have a certain amount of money to show as "the bank," from which he can pay if luck should go in favour of the players. Each man playing puts what money he wishes to stake on the emblem of his choice. If, after being shaken, the dice show his emblem, he wins back his own stake and as much more again. On the other hand, if his emblem does not come up, he forfeits his stake. There is generally a crowd trying their fortune at the same time, and most of the emblems are covered with notes. The experience of a soldier's life in escaping death and wounds impresses him with the idea of lucky chance. War breeds gambling as a natural and inevitable fruit. Many soldiers are devotees of luck and have their theories of chances, and believe one night they'll break the bank. They watch the dice and the board intently, and wait

until some emblem has not come up for seven or eight times, and then they back it for all they are worth, believing in a law of chances—some fantastic notion which reigns in their simple mind that chances are bound to work out even in the end. A young fellow who used to be very hard up and suddenly became affluent, explained to me that he was now working on an infallible system. He explained that he would start by putting a franc on the board ; if he lost, he put on two francs ; if he lost again, he put on four francs ; if again, sixteen francs. It was incredible that he should not by then have a lucky turn. But I remarked that even if he won then he only made a net gain of one franc.

“ That’s the worst that can happen,” said he.

Where there is no theory of chances there is often a sentimental bias ; young soldiers stake on the anchor and the heart, ambitious ones on the crown, dare-devils on the diamond and the spade.

It should be explained that each of the emblems except the heart has its nickname. Thus the crown is the sergeant-major ; the spade is referred to as the shovel ; the diamond is called the curse ; the anchor is the meat-hook. Any one putting money both on the crown and the anchor is supporting the name of the game, though the commonest name of the game is Bumble and Buck.

The man who holds the board keeps up an extraordinary stream of patter, to which it is amusing to listen. Men are evidently spurred

on and excited by this chatter, as if it were evidence of fortunes being made.

"Here we are again. The Sweaty Socks ! Cox & Co., the Army Bankers, badly bent, but never broke, safe as the Bank of England, undefeated because they never fought ; the rough and tough, the old and bold ! Where you lay we pay. Come and put your money with the lucky old man. I touch the money, but I never touch the dice. Any more for the lucky old heart ? Make it even on the lucky old heart. Are you all done, gentlemen ? . . . *Are you all done ?* . . . The diamond, meat-hook, and lucky old sergeant-major. (He shakes the dice again.) Now, then, will any one down on his luck put a little bit of snow (some silver) on the curse ? Does any one say a bit of snow on the old hook ? Has no one thought of the pioneer's tool ? Are you all done, gentlemen ? *Are you all done ?* . . . Cocked dice are no man's dice. Change your bets or double them ! Now, then, *up she comes again*. The mud-rake, the shamrock, and the lucky old heart. Copper to copper, silver to silver, and *gold to gold*. We shall have to drag the old anchor a bit. (Rattles the dice.) Now who tries his luck on the name of the game ? "

And so on for hours ! Piles of notes and coin are taken and stuffed rapidly into an old cigar-box. The crowd round the board never slackens. Every now and then the owner of the board sorts out from his winnings twelve of the worst-looking francs, and orders a bottle of champagne

for his hangers-on and the good of the estaminet and the company. This sets the winners buying drinks, and is so profitable to the public-house that they accept the bad notes for the champagne without a murmur.

I always felt a curious prejudice against taking part in the game myself, even for the fun of it. I felt I could win heaps of money if I gambled, for I've always been so lucky in life, such a good Providence has had charge over me.

“Why does Steeven never gamble? Did ye never make a gamble, man?”

“Oh, no. I think it would be unfair. I’m so fearfully lucky at all that sort of thing.”

This very much impressed some of them, and they used to beg from me to go and gamble so that my money should give them luck. I used to save those torn and defaced notes which the French refused to accept in payment for their eggs and for what they called coffee, and give them to a few devotees of the game.

I noticed, however, that they never won anything with my money, but sometimes even were reduced to risk some money they had not gleaned in this way. The good luck was changed to bad luck in their hands.

I asked our chaplain one day what he thought of the Bumble and Buck game. But although it was in full swing in every village, he had never seen it, and I had to explain. I thought that an interesting illustration of the way the chaplain’s rank of Captain was a hindrance to him.

The game was illegal, and therefore no officer must see it being played.

But certainly there was not much harm in the gambling. Money was lost, but then money was a lighter article out there than at home. There was nothing much to spend it on.

Bumble and Buck, cards, cigarettes, and when out of the line beer, *vin blanc*, and flirtation with French girls made the chief mental relief of the men. And somehow it seems natural in the army to be on the level of these pleasures. I opened boxes of camp library stuff several times and saw it distributed, but of reading and thinking in a serious way there was little.

In the fighting battalion there were few men of any education or of studious nature. The educated men got broken by the training in Little Sparta, or in some other way "escaped drafts," and the working men remained. I do not know what it was in other regiments, but at the front ours was absolutely a working men's regiment as far as the men were concerned. The officers were aristocracy and the men proletariat. If my health had broken, I think it would have been easy for me to have got away—had I so desired. And, as it was, I could have obtained a commission had I wished. Generally speaking, any one of education could get away from our ranks. But I remained, and all about me were the British working class in khaki.

These men who were so alike, so indisputably

one as soldiery, had been recruited from every shape and form of industrialism. They were taken from the factory and the loom, from the mines and the docks and the yards, from builders' ladders and trestles and the artisans' tables and tools, from the plough and from the fishing-boats and the nets. Though they were our cannon-fodder or our "bayonets," they were also the vital stuff of our vast democracy, the men who drive the great machine of our civilisation—perhaps the most significant people of the time. I was among them and not of them, but heart and mind never ceased to be occupied with them and their problems, and with our England which they make and may remake.

Every one looking from above downward has said : *The men are splendid!* That formula is the only fitting one for those who have suffered and done so much, bearing the frightful physical burdens of war with a cheerfulness which was never extinguished. But there is something more to be thought about the condition of the men—if not said. Even if they make ideal soldiers they have not had ideal conditions of life in our civilisation, they have not had the chances of education which they merited, and many of them live ordinarily in a state of ignorance and immorality which tarnish the real glory of Britain.

Doubtless when a man has died in battle it does not matter whether he knew who Shakespeare was or whether he was a customer of the woman who lurketh at the corner. He is sped, and God will forgive him and give him another

chance to get the glorious things he missed. The army point of view would certainly be that ignorance or immorality or anything of that sort was no drawback to good soldiering. Many would incline to the view that these things generally characterised a better soldier than did their absence. But besides looking at the matter from the point of view of war and death we can and must look from the other point of view—namely of peace and life.

I made at one time a review of our situation and endeavoured to provide an answer to the question, What is the ignorance of the working man as revealed when he is taken away from his trade and put into khaki ?

I found that no one knew anything of literature. Our national glories of the word were naught to my mates. They were deaf to the songs which should thrill and inspire. Shakespeare was a mere name. Tennyson and Browning and Keats were unknown. If you quoted to them from Keats you must explain that a man called Keats wrote it. If the soldiers opened the books they could not grasp what the poems were about. Our prized language when used in a noble way was like a foreign tongue. If you spoke to them in normal correct English they did not quite understand and you had to re-express yourself in halting working man's English, full of "you see" and "it's like this" and expletives and vulgarisms, or the working man would be rather offended at the way you spoke and imitate you in a drawl when your back was turned. Dickens

and Scott, again, were little more than names. Occasionally one found a lover of Dickens who craved in the trenches for *Pickwick Papers* but found it not; occasionally one met a man who loved the tales and romances of Sir Walter Scott.

I met one day an old soldier who had read Gray's *Elegy* and had visited Stoke Poges Church-yard to feel again what Gray had felt, and he told me with pride as if he alone knew it, how General Wolfe had said he would rather have written the *Elegy* than take Quebec.

"Tell me," said he, "there was a feller th'other day had a dispute with me. How d'ye pronounce the word p-i-a-n-i-s-t?"

"Pianist," said I.

"What?" said he. "Not piannist! oh, well, you're wrong, and it doesn't matter. The proper pronunciation is piannist."

He was quiet for a few moments, deeply mortified. "Oh, well," said he at last, "I don't think pronunciation is so important as some make out."

"Oh, no," said I. To care for Gray's *Elegy* is much more than correct pronunciation. And we became friends from that day.

One man knowing the *Elegy* was good. But who knew Campbell? The simple beauty and pathos of Campbell's soldier poems, whispered as it were to the soldier's heart, were as if they had not been written. "Our bugles sang truce for the night cloud had lowered," "Few, few shall part where many meet."

The most hackneyed quotations known to the

middle and upper classes were mysteries here, and having a habit of saying such words in jest I have often had to explain to a comrade, much to my own astonishment, what I mean when I say, "Oh, Cromwell, Cromwell, had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my King, he would not in mine old age have left me naked to mine enemies."

Or,

Charge, Chester, charge !
On, Mr. Boffin, on !

quotations which so often rise to the mind as comments on incidents in army life. It is no use reproaching your fellow-soldier, "Et tu Brute," or exclaiming, "What, can the devil speak true ! " for he won't understand what you're talking about. On expressing my surprise to a companion on this count one day he replied :

"I'm sorry and all that kind o' muck, old pally, but ye see I just wasn't taught any o' that stuff when I was at school."

Not one in a thousand knows the watchwords of the war, such as the words which Kipling gave :

Who stands if Freedom fall ?
Who dies if England live ?

One finds such a historic monition as "Nelson expects that every man this day will do his duty" is only known by a few, and that in a false way. But when some General perverts those lines to "England expects that every tank will do its damndest," "doing its damndest" rather hits their humour and "catches on."

And if the working men are deaf to what is

national, they are almost as deaf to the transient greatness of our times. Not for them did Rupert Brooke write the most beautiful sonnet of a decade. I was at pains to find out who had read *Mr. Britling sees it through*. Not one could I find, and though that clever novel was so astonishingly popular it was not so because the working man was reading it. It was not providing the working man with a voice about the war and life. Hall Caine is read, and I once heard a superior recruit speak of his writing as good healthy literature. But even Hall Caine is too intellectual at times. Our ardent writers such as Masefield, Chesterton, Conrad, and Bennett find their readers among what Russian revolutionary soldiers and workmen call indiscriminately *the bourgeois*, but not among the rank and file.

I canvassed a room one day and found that only three in it had heard of H. G. Wells, and one thought he wrote for *John Bull* and had a "flashy style." The name of Bernard Shaw was better known because of the greater number of newspaper remarks concerning him.

I met one day a man called Shaw and asked him if he knew anything of his namesake the dramatist.

"Yes," said he, "I named my little boy Bernard after him so that when he grew up he might have some bloomin' luck perhaps."

"Did you ever read any of his plays or see one acted at a theatre?"

"No. I saw one of his books once, but I never read it . . . yes, yes, Bernard Shaw the

great author—there's a statue of him somewhere in the West End."

"One day a sergeant came to me and said : "You used to write for the *Times*, didn't you ?"

"Yes," said I.

"I sent two jokes to *Answers* last week," said he.

"Then we are colleagues and fellow-workers," said I ; and I always was on speaking terms with that sergeant.

What the men do read is Florence Warden and Charles Garvice, and books with such titles as "The Temptress," "Red Rube's Revenge," "The Lost Diamonds"—gaudy adventure stories which can be torn for cigarette lights later on. All prefer, however, to look at pictures rather than read. Some even seem a little troubled when they receive long letters from their wives or sweethearts.

They read such papers as *London Mail*, *London Opinion*, and *Ideas*, and voraciously devour *John Bull*, which has the art or the knack to express grousing in print. Many newspapers are provided for them free, and I used to find it rather strange in reading-rooms and libraries at Little Sparta and in London, that the *Express* and the *Sketch* and the *Mirror* got dirty and torn each day, whereas the *Times* and the *Morning Post* remained comparatively untouched.

Then though we possessed many splendid old national songs, you'd listen in vain to hear one sung by the soldiers. Or if the old airs were sung, they were merely the accompaniment of

modern words or parodies. The imitation of music-hall humour and music-hall singing was most widespread. In fact they had the culture of the music-hall.

They are called to fight for their country in the latest of a series of historic wars, but they know next to nothing of our history or even of its famous names. Who was Henry the Fifth? What did Henry the Eighth do beyond having wives? Wolsey? Raleigh and Drake? Cromwell? Marlborough? Pitt? They know the Duke of Wellington overcame Napoleon, but I heard an officer ask a man for the date of the battle of Waterloo and he could not say. George the First, the Second, the Third, Fourth and Fifth—they don't know much about that series. Edward VII. meant more, and they generally refer to the present King as Teddie.

“What did Teddie say to you?” they asked of me after the King's inspection of us. “Was Teddie looking at our kit?” they asked.

Yet each and every one of these men in khaki had some technical knowledge with reference to the use of some tool. It might be a very limited knowledge and a very small tool, but it earned his living and made him a part of the great industrial machine of England.

VIII

FRANCE UNDER THE CLOUD

THE vast concourse of the new drafts was distributed along the line. Most went to the defence of Amiens from the onslaught from the north ; we to the defence of Arras from encirclement from the south. The position was briefly this : The Germans, following up their immense initial success of March 21, were advancing along the whole line from before Amiens to Albert and from Albert to Arras. British units were retreating before the face of the Germans, following partly their own inclinations and partly the orders of the Staff. Our Division, I believe, acted to a great extent on its own responsibility in going forward when every other unit was going back. It marched forward to meet and stop the Germans, and it found that the real defenders of the line had quitted the field. There was some difficulty in locating the enemy, and whilst seeking him the Division was shelled by its own artillery. When at last we found the German, he also found us, and coming forward in mass formation endeavoured to stampede our men as he had stampeded so many units before us on that and other

parts of the field. By all accounts the enemy was most enraged to find the Guards in his way. But, confident in his numbers and in the impetus of victory, he did not doubt but that he could force a way over and through. The discipline of the Division permitted of no retirement, and the men stood to their guns and fired rapidly at the great living target of the enemy sweeping down upon them. All the time the men were firing they knew that if the enemy's numbers got the upper hand there would be a terrible hand-to-hand struggle in the trenches, and that in the end most of them would be lying killed or wounded on the battle-ground. But all the great hostile attacks withered away under the hand of death, and the line was held. It was a great service, for if the Germans had broken through there also, Arras would have fallen and the whole position might well have proved irremediable.

Though in our draft only one was wounded and none was killed, it was a terrible impression of the reality of war for the new men. "I'm going to make my peace with God before ever I go up to the line again," said Fitz when he came out of it. "Each *Minnewerfer* coming at us was like a row of houses rushing through the air," said another. "Poor old K—— was bobbing like a baby," said another. All seemed surprised by the war and scared, as if they had never imagined the thing before they saw it. In each man's eyes there was the sign of shock and strain. One very dull boy of eighteen, who

had astonished me once by telling a questioning C.O. that the South African War was fought in Egypt, seemed suddenly to have been wakened though not to have become articulate. He now laughed like Charley Bates, and said "oo-hoo" and "not 'arf" when asked what he thought of the Front and did he find it bad.

However, after this initial flutter all became quiet. The Germans had taken large measure of the discipline of the Guards and wanted no more of it. The success was pronounced and remarkable: already by the 30th of March the French newspapers were very congratulatory. So we read at that time in *Le Journal* these flattering words about our Division:

Ces grands gaillards, taillés en athlètes, ne crient ni s'agitent. Ils courent à la mêlée avec ce même flegme et cette même fierté que je notai voici trois ans, un matin d'hiver ou, sur un plateau au sud d'Abbeville, j'allai les voir passer en revue par le duc de Connaught. Ils incarnent la tenacité britannique. Ce sont les mâchoires carrées. Où la garde est engagée, la frontière de guerre ne recule jamais.

So remarkable was the discipline of the Division that certain battalions were detached from it and sent to stiffen and give backbone to other parts of the army, and they helped to gain the brilliant victory of Ayette. From Ayette they were taken and thrown into the scale on the Ypres Front when the second huge German attack was launched. The new drafts from Little Sparta went straight into the battle-line, and many a man was killed before he was properly registered or

known in the battalion to which he was posted. They participated in the most heroic and terrible exploit of the war, and fought to the last man near l'Epinette on the Hazebrouck Road. Nothing that was written then or that can be written afterwards can do justice to their tenacity and brilliance and to their sacrifice in Belgium. Units on both flanks gave way, and they were enveloped and outnumbered by an enemy who had brought field-guns up to the positions of machine-guns and fired point blank at them. There it was that the nightmare circle of Germans enveloped the heroic Captain Price and his men, and encroached upon them with the visage of inevitable death or bondage, and he led his men out and drove them back at the point of the bayonet, and extended the area of the circle, which nevertheless again encroached and encroached. Three times he charged them and then died fighting. One wounded corporal lying in a ditch crawled back at night and told the tale, the only survivor of a whole company. The Captain was awarded a V.C., and every man who perished with him earned a sort of deathless glory. There never was in any annals a more marvellous stubbornness or a greater example of what discipline will do. Among those who fell were men who had but just set foot in France—some in fact of the last hundred thousand. And such a deed, though it could not save those who performed it, must have gained an enormous victory over the German morale and have put also a great inspiration

into all the other troops in Flanders. The enemy's onset was brought to a standstill, and that meant the ruin of his vast designs. I was invited one day to go over and talk to the Colonel and some of the men who survived, and I saw to what dimensions this heroic fourth brigade had shrunk, all that was left of three battalions, in tents in one field near La Cauchie. I think it proved impossible to find recruits to make up the numbers of these battalions ; they were sent to the coast to recuperate and wait. In the autumn campaign most of the survivors were drafted to other battalions in the brigades which remained.

On the Arras-Ayette Front, where most of us lay, the line became serene and no one ever saw an enemy. Probably all the troops except patrols had been withdrawn. Only the artillery methodically shelled our lines and the roads. There was current among us a quaint parody of Browning :

God's in His heaven,
The Guard's in the line,

which was whispered from man to man, though probably no one in the ranks of our battalion could have quoted the original. However, the fact was true : the Guard was in the line and all was right with the world. There ensued on the Arras Front a halcyon summer which was not to be interrupted until late August, when the great advance of the autumn campaign began.

So we were left not so much with the war as with France, and we both lived with her and considered her in her aspects of partial destruc-

tion and love among the ruins. It was in a region that had suffered greatly during the early campaigns. The eye ached to look at the ruins, and was continually preoccupied building them up again. It was the region of Berles-au-Bois, where the antique church is a forlorn ruin beside the debris of the homes of its parishioners. It was beyond the flat misery of Monchy and the wreckage of charming Blairville and the sinister gas-stricken woodland of Adinfer.

From these places the war had receded, but with the onset of March 21 they were engulfed again. The peasants and villagers had come back after their first exile and now were driven into a second. One of the most pathetic phenomena of the whole region were the new shacks put up by the American Relief Committee for the returning homeless ones now wrecked in turn by shells, these shacks lying wrenching and torn and yet so obviously new and clean, having been lived in such a short while.

The peasants, loth as ever to leave their lands, clung to their farms and their cottages to the last possible moment, and they were to be seen everywhere, cheerfully working even under fire, the instinct which rooted them to the soil they knew being much stronger than any instinct of fear. The women in the fields greatly won the admiration of our men for the life of toil they led, and we reflected how few women at home would be ready to live the hard life of a French peasant woman. Whether they would have cared to see

their own mothers and sisters thus enslaved to the earth is not so certain as that they admired it in the French.

The seeming piety of the French home with all its sacred pictures and relics was rather puzzling to the Tommy, but he realised that it did not make any difference to character, and that the religiously-minded girl was as accessible to his love-making as if she had no religion, and that the piety of the old wife did not cause her to charge less for her eggs. The conventionality and conservatism of the people's lives were very remarkable, and not what one would have expected in the land of so many revolutions. There was on every hand a curious simplicity of mind, and many were "stupid to the point of piety." The atmosphere, especially on Sunday, when the people overloaded with clothes crept sluggishly and obediently to church, was mediaeval.

I was billeted for a while in a farm-house where the husband was at the war and the wife and wife's mother had an antediluvian intelligence. They had had a shell through their roof one day, but to them everything was funny—the shells, the rain, the mud, the drilling in the yard. The two girls of fifteen and thirteen deceived mother and grandmother all the time, smiled on us always, and were kissed and squeezed by all the soldiers who came in.

"I suppose you'll marry an English soldier," said I to Marie one day.

"Oh no ; Mamma doesn't think it would be good to marry while the war is on. Nothing

arranged in these times is binding. But afterwards I'll marry a Frenchman."

"But you love So-and-so very much? Won't you be sorry when the battalion goes away?"

"Oh no, it's nothing."

I said I was shocked.

"C'est la guerre," said she, and waved her hand and smiled.

"What do you think of these French girls? Aren't they astonishingly forward with us?" I asked a fellow-soldier.

"They can't help it, it's their blood," said he.

I wondered whether Mamma and Grand-mamma, who were and looked so phenomenally stupid, had the same wiles and smiles as Marie when they were young.

There was a great deal of mixed war life and village life in the region immediately behind the lines. The villages swarmed with troops. Every mother who possessed a pretty girl seemed to use her as an innocent lure to sell bad coffee or wine to the soldiers who crowded in to flirt with her and say things to her they could never have said to an English girl. I think the French girls who repeated and threw back at the men all the bad language they heard had little notion what it all meant.

What gay scenes there were in those large square yards in front of the farm-houses: the girls on the verandah, the men in and out of the barns where they were billeted! The roads were continually possessed by a swirl of motor-lorries and horse-limber waggons, and now and then a

company of men marching to or from parade-ground would appear. In the evenings the band played beside the church—sometimes a first-class military band from London, containing many excellent musicians; more often our pipers or the pipers of the Micks.

April mud gave way to May sunshine and drought. There was a respite and sanctuary from the war in the development of spring. The 9th of May, Ascension Day, was an especially lovely one, which I well remember. May must be twice May to be perfect. 'Twas so this day. I had been sent to a neighbouring headquarters with a message, and at noon I sat for a while beside a high hawthorn on a daisy-covered bank. The war ceased to exist; only beauty was infinitely high and broad above and infinitely deep within. Birds again sang in the heavens and in the heart—after a long sad silence, as it seemed. On the road below me a never-ending stream of Indians with dusky brows and brown turbans went riding by, and lorries and limbers plunged and struggled—the long caravan of war. Sulphurous splashes of smoke and sharp buffeting concussions broke from a camouflaged battery in a ravine, and it seemed as if the verdure of spring threatened to put hands over the cannon's mouth and stop its male voice, as a wife might stop her husband saying words she did not wish to hear. Beyond the ravine was a wood, over which, flying low like an owl staring for mice, the aeroplanes crept through the atmosphere, screening from enemy observance their exit and

entrance from battle air. In another direction a deflated khaki-coloured observation-balloon wallowed in bright dandelion fields. Coming down the road appeared chains of artillery traction-engines with negro drivers, and squads of Lewis gunners with their fatal iron tubes. Yet all the while in five-acre fields the quiet peasants with bent backs looked as if they had stolen out of Millet's pictures. On the right in the distance was the wonderful spire of the village church of P_____, on the left were the staggering ruins of the tower of B_____-au-B_____.

In the evening I was in P_____, and the pipers were playing at the foot of the beautiful church. Huge disjected lumps of stone lay about, they had fallen when the church was last hit by a shell. It was Ascension Day and the band played well, but it could not cause the stones to rise up to their places. The flare and stridency of the pipes thrilled the blood in the veins and made one feel that the something in honour of which they played must be splendid and important, but the grey stone wall of the church seemed nevertheless wrapped in its own silence and remote from all of us as if existing in another plane. The spire above seemed to be invested with a power which was more than our human power of which we were so proud. However, the pipers and drummers fulfilled their program, and a hap-hazard collection of earthy-looking peasants stood and stared and listened. So the vulgar war went on, but the fourteenth century still pointed a sharp forefinger to the sky.

One day whilst stationed at Sombrin the alarm of a German "break-through" was given, and the Division was rushed up towards the line to save the day. It was only a test, but it was exceedingly well carried out. Each company cheered when it was told it had to go and stop the Germans. With us a brigade of the new American troops was co-operating, and our fellows saw the "Yanks" for the first time. They were a magnificent body of men and marched with wonderful verve, singing all the way. "John Brown's body" seemed to be the most popular air, and the words they sang were amusing :

All we ever do is sign the pay-roll,
But we never draw a God-damn cent.

They shouted to us, "You can go home now" and "We've come to win the war," and we believed them and were glad.

The summer, as I have said, was serene. Nevertheless the menace of another great attack hung over all the region of our front like a cloud. The French were told that we had come, and that therefore they were absolutely safe from a further attack. For we never retired. The Americans were pointed to as another guarantee of safety. Still, it did not need sharp eyes to see that every imaginable precaution was being taken in case Fritz should drive us out. On many wells began to appear the notice "*Prepared for Demolition*," and on bridges, "*Warning: this Bridge is mined.*" On the trees alongside the roadways were

gashes where explosives had been inserted in the trunks for the purpose of readily blowing them up and bringing them down across the road—thus to obstruct the enemy transport in the course of his advance. Buildings were mined. Long stretches of the highway ran over sleeping cordite which but a touch would awake. Traps of all kinds were prepared for the enemy by our ingenious engineers. One read on detachable posts such notices as *W↑D No. 99 Booby Trap*. About the villages for leagues back, tens of miles back, the Chinamen and Labour men, "camouflaged heroes," as we sarcastically named them, were busy digging breastworks for delaying actions. All inhabitants were officially warned that they stayed on at their peril. Meanwhile our "intelligence" reported large concentrations of enemy forces at points upon our line, and we were ready for a destructive retreat on the lines of the model retirement of the Germans in March 1917, when they abandoned the battle-fields of the Somme. It is perhaps doubtful whether we should have chopped the fruit trees as they did. But we should have made a desert for the enemy to dwell in.

How good that it all turned out to be superfluous, that victory should favour us instead of him, and that instead of his overrunning our lines we should penetrate far into his! Yet so it was, and the story destined to begin August 1918 was one of advance and of relief.

None of the precautionary arrangements were destined to be used, and when the reinforcements

and the transport left to follow up our victorious advance a curious stillness and peace seemed to be born in the villages. The notices on the wells, the tickets on the breastworks—B-support, C-switch, etc.—seemed as unwonted as did the clay-cut trenches themselves. With relief every one realised that the trees would not be blown up and that a certificate of immunity had been handed by destiny to all manner of bridges and roads and homes. The whole atmosphere changed, a new light was shed on whole countrysides. Yes, because the cloud had lifted. Into this new light exiles returned once more to try and continue the old life as they felt God had intended it always to be led.

But if peace crept into the land from which we advanced following the enemy, what madness and calamity of destruction poured into the land to which we advanced and from which mile by mile we drove the Germans ! There, as if to be revenged for some baulked prey, the spirit of the war expressed itself with all the rage of its possession.

Peace settled down upon the stones of Monchy-au-Bois and the ridges of Ransart ; the menace of the occasional shell was lifted from the Arras-Doullens Road. The railway resumed its service to Arras, and from the heights of Blairville engines could be seen puffing along a new stretch of country. Arras itself crept away from the fires of destruction. The receding tide of battle foamed backward to Bapaume ; and whilst Ayette and Achiet gained the sanctuary of peace,

the intensified rage of the war descended upon Croisilles, St. Leger, Riencourt, and many another staying-place of enemy power. Dead men once more lay unburied in the tumbled villages, for there was no time to bury so many. Our arms went on, and still the clouds went on lifting from France—not now, however, from half-destroyed homes and patient peasants, but from totally destroyed country devoid of home and habitation. The complete absence of civilians gave the rescued ruins of villages the aspect of cemeteries and ancient ruins of cities—as if in the far past a civilisation had obtained and been destroyed. That is what we saw when the fire-curtain lifted.

IX

WAR THE BRUTALISER

THERE is more experience in the private soldier's life than there is in that of the officer. The reality of the army and the war is more sharply felt in the ranks. It is not possible to deceive oneself so much about war or to be deceived by events and actions themselves. You escape from the conventional and from a certain artificial form and style. Indeed, to serve in the ranks is an unique opportunity to get to know the working man. Perhaps there are not many people who want to know him ; they only want him to do his job and keep them comfortable. But if any one desires to know him as he is in his natural strength and weakness, with his foibles and his charms and also with all his repellent deficiencies of grammar and taste, the private's uniform in the war afforded a short way.

It was a great experience. You learned about yourself and your neighbour what you never knew before. You shed many illusions about both personalities, and through all the bullying and petting and camaraderie you learned much of human nature.

I was undeceived a great deal. I used to think too lightly of men going to war and of the sacrifice they make and what they undergo. I used to think courage and verve and human idealism made the real driving power of the army in time of war, and it seemed that in putting on the King's uniform one put on the ideal. But we all of us soon learned that the uniform betokened hard duty and bondage, a durance such as that of slave or prisoner. Though men were generous in offering themselves to fight for their country, or even in agreeing to fight when called upon to do so, there was no atmosphere of generosity and national gratitude, but rather an atmosphere of every man expecting his neighbour to shirk what he could. Private soldiers were all passive. Non-commissioned officers were active and drove privates to do what was required. The real driving power lay in brutal thought and word and act. The *open sesame* of the army was the characteristic of brutality, and I noticed that men who were not in themselves brutal cultivated brutality to get the army tone.

The characteristic word of command was not merely enforced by firmness, by peremptoriness, by loudness. The vital thing in it must be menace ; it must be an intimidating bawl, and must not only be heard, but must act on the nerves. Soldiers must be drilled as a Tartar drives his horses—by frightening them all the way.

The regimental sergeant-major is like a big yard-dog. He rushes forward and barks menac-

ingly at any one who appears on his line of vision. He waits outside billets and pounces on luckless soldiers, snarling, "What 're *you* on?" Rarely by any chance does he exhibit a kindly interest in any one. He does not act the part of a father to the soldiers. His position forbids it. He is paid to be terrible, and whatever he may have been whilst un-promoted, he is due to take up this rôle of being terrible when he gets to be R.S.M. He then cultivates *the voice*. And he soon learns to love his authority. He ought really to devote his attention more to checking the ways of N.C.O.'s, and have no appetite for such small fry as privates. I have seen a very clumsy and broken-down drill-sergeant rise to the dizzy height of R.S.M. probably through sagacious toadying to officers, and such a man, whilst easy-going as a drill-sergeant, became at once a Tartar as sergeant-major, and set out to take down the pride of the really smart men whose appearance was perchance an offence to the "funniest man who ever wore a bumble and buck board on his sleeve." I remember how he brought up a wonderful C.O.'s orderly for insubordination, and the latter was reduced to defending himself before the C.O.

"It's like this, sir, if it's a choice between offending you and the sergeant-major of my battalion, I'd rather offend the sergeant-major."

"Admonished," says the C.O.

"Fall in," says the R.S.M. in rage, and then, as the defendant orderly is dismissed, he rushes after him and calls out, "You've got too much

to say for yourself, you have. Take his name for haircut."

So next day the orderly will be brought up before the adjutant.

However, a sense of humour dilutes any bitterness which such petty tyranny might produce. I remember listening to the orderly. He was one of the cleverest natural wits I have come across in the army.

Says he : "Once there was a fisherman fishing on the west coast of Scotland, and he brought up an unclean thing. Who would have thought that that unclean thing would have survived to become the sergeant-major of this battalion ?"

Of course this R.S.M. was not the famous Jimmy nor the immortal Dan. Not he.

Of "Jimmy" our Colonel once made a remark which might serve as the epitaph of a famous R.S.M. : "He was the deadly foe of humbug : his touch remained long after he was gone."

I was rather amused to read the C.O.'s marginal note to a minute which had been prepared on the subject of sympathy : "Sympathy does not consist in listening to yarns. Sympathy becomes practical when an officer takes a hell of a lot of trouble to know his men and his work."

Very true. But it is these "deadly foes of humbug" who are the sympathy-killers.

Well, the regimental sergeant-major is the big bow-wow. All the lesser N.C.O.'s are the lesser fry, with the lesser barks and the lesser snarls.

Even private soldiers, when they think they can try it on, will bark and growl at one another, and "give a steady one" in regimental style. Snarling provides the atmosphere of the ranks.

"Ain't I a great hand at putting the wind up, eh?" said a sergeant to me in pride, fresh from a bout of cursing and swearing at his platoon.

I did not show much sympathy with him. "You'd get better results if you encouraged them more," said I.

"What's the matter with you, Steeven," he replied, "is you're too soft? You'd never get on in the army."

I confessed I had been brought up always to try to put people at ease. If I lived to a hundred I should never be able to taunt and damn and terrify in the regimental fashion, and so get things done.

Nevertheless, the men of our regiment, cursed and driven into every fatigue or fight, behaved astonishingly well from a military point of view. They did better than men in other regiments where the sergeants did not so constantly "put the wind up 'em." The method seemed always justified.

That the driving-power of the army arose from courage and voluntary sacrifice was the first illusion to fall. The second was that of chivalry. It seems that in former wars one granted to the enemy a great deal of human dignity. Though

he was a foe, he was a fellow-creature, and was saved by his Redeemer as much as we were. But the opinion cultivated in the army regarding the Germans was that they were a sort of vermin like plague-rats that had to be exterminated. Although the British soldier had a "sneaking" admiration for the German as a good fighter, this admiration was generally eliminated through the inspiration of officers and N.C.O.'s. The regimental tone absolutely forbade admiration of anything in connection with Germans. "Killing Huns" was our cheerful task, as one of our leaders once told us. The idea of taking prisoners had become very unpopular among the men. A good soldier was one who would not take a prisoner. If called on to escort prisoners to the cage, it could always be justifiable to kill them on the way and say they tried to escape. Did not So-and-so get a D.C.M. for shooting prisoners? "Thank God, this battalion's always been blessed with a C.O. who didn't believe in taking prisoners," says a sergeant. Captain C_____, who at Festubert shot two German officer-prisoners with whom he had an altercation, was always a hero, and when one man told the story, "That's the stuff to gi' 'em," said the delighted listeners. That this preyed on C_____'s mind, and that as a sort of expiation he lavished care and kindness on German prisoners ever after, till he was killed at Cambrai, was not so popular a story.

It was curious, however, that in battle itself there was more squeamishness about brutality

in actuality than there had been in conversation. The old hands, the men who had the regimental tone, were equal to their words, but the younger and newer ones hardly liked it. I remember a characteristic case in the first advance. A German machine-gun post had been holding up the British advance and inflicting murderous casualties. The machine was enveloped and rushed, and the Germans held up their hands and surrendered. An old-time sergeant goes up to his officer, who, by the bye, was a poet, and wrote some very charming lyrics and had a taste in Art, and salutes : "Leave to shoot the prisoners, sir ?" "What do you want to shoot them for ?" says the poet. "To avenge my brother's death," says the sergeant. I suppose the poet tells him to carry on. He pinks the Germans one after one, and some of our fellows say "Bravo !" and in others the blood runs cold. In the same battle the sergeant himself perishes, and a sort of poetic justice seems to have overtaken him. But it is the stuff of which he was made that makes us terrible to the enemy. The enemy knows about it, gets to know infallibly, and having no great moral cause to help him, does not flame with noble anger, but is merely afraid and wishes the war were at an end.

I remember the disgust of one of our American volunteers at this episode. For a few days it caused a reaction in him, and made him quite warm-hearted toward Germans. But when he had been in one or two more frays he also caught

the regimental point of view, and was ready to "kill Huns *ad libitum*."

There was a characteristic way of speaking to the Tommies :

"The second bayonet man kills the wounded," says the bombing-instructor. "You cannot afford to be encumbered by wounded enemies lying about your feet. Don't be squeamish. The army provides you with a good pair of boots ; you know how to use them."

"... Don't go wandering down deep dug-outs in search of spoil or enemies, but if you think there's any Bosche down below, just send them down a few Mills bombs to keep 'em quiet."

"... At this point the Germans come out of the machine-gun nest holding up their hands, and the man with the Lewis gun forgets to take his fingers off the trigger."

No one said to the men, "By refusing to take prisoners, by killing prisoners, ill-treating them, or killing wounded men, you make it only the worse for yourselves when it may be your lot to fall into the enemy's hands. Remember he holds as many British as we do Germans." The stories of our brutality inevitably got across to the Germans, and made it worse for our poor fellows on the other side. No one said, "It is good to take prisoners ; take as many as you possibly can. That tends to end the war. But by ferocious habits you are only making this war into a mutual torture and destruction society for all men between eighteen and forty-five.

Out of cruelty comes cruelty. Out of mercy comes mercy."

The young ones dimly understood this in themselves, but it did not obtain currency; the older army types, with standardised regimental point of view, kept all new recruits staunch.

In enforcing and excusing brutality it was common to recount the known atrocities the enemy had committed, the regimental stories of his tricky ways. And it was possible by enumerating his crimes to seem to justify any cruelty or barbarity on our part, and to let us assume that if we thought of him as devil, that was just what he was. But a fair mind knew that atrocities and barbarities and cruelties of all kinds had abounded on both sides, and that both enemies (ours and theirs) had behaved in ways unworthy of man.

The mind is curiously ready to think evil. An incident in the course of the great advance will illustrate "thinking evil" and "being brutal."

There were a number of us in B—— the morning after it had been captured. We were sitting by a fire in a farm-house. The sound of rifle-fire in the village street was noticed, and suddenly a man bursts in and says that a German has come out of one of the cellars and has been sniping civilians. That seemed to account for the rifle-fire. Three or four men snatched their rifles from the wall and rushed out at the door, calling out :

"The dirty bastard, we'll teach him to snipe villagers!"

The others in the farm did not stir. But presently the would-be executioners of Fritz came back and clanked their rifles down again. It was a "wash-out." The German was dead. A Taffy had shot him. "Did the German wound any of the French?" we asked. No. He wasn't sniping, but was lying on the floor of a cellar. The French had discovered him, and had run out to tell our fellows. A Taffy had come and peered down the cellar-stairs. There in the gloom lay the enemy soldier in his greyish-blue uniform, apparently sleeping. The Welshman fired a shot at him. Then the German sat up. He fired seven more shots, and then dragged the body upstairs and threw it on the dunghill in the yard, searched the pockets of the uniform, and went away. The incident was closed.

I went up then with some others to look at the German soldier. There he was, on a dunghill in the squared yard of the farmhouse. To my surprise he was still alive, not yet dead. He had apparently been wounded the day before, for his right arm was swathed in linen and had been in a sling. His face was pink and white, very white and livid pink, and his little waxy eyes stared at us without expression. His white breast heaved up and down. So we looked at him and pitied, and went away. And he lay on the dunghill and the rain washed down, and I suppose he died in a few hours.

"Can he stand on his spindles?" asked the kindest man at our Red Cross post. "No? Then let him lie where he is. The Taffies ought to have carried him in; he's not our case."

Some weeks afterwards I heard the story re-told. It had grown like the proverbial rolling snowball. Thus it ran: The German had crept out of a cellar and killed and wounded half-a-dozen women and children before one of the Taffy snipers put a bullet through his neck and ended him.

"And serve him right, the dirty dog. I hope he had a lingering death," said some one.

When the true story was told, some one made an obscene remark. But that was the way until the soldiers got to Germany and saw the Germans for themselves.

X

BRINGING BACK THE BODY OF MR. B—

ON the evening of the first day of the great battle a party was sent with Captain E— to the line.

There had been the first advance, the battle shadow had lifted off the villages in the rear, bathing them in the new atmosphere of peace ; the curtain had risen to disclose the ruins of the villages in front after the guns had spoken. For four months we had sat facing one another in trenches on the ridges, but now at the end of August our army had left its front line behind ; it had crossed the smashed and devastated German line, upon which so methodically our artillery had played, and then the second German line, preceded by planes overhead and tanks on the ground ; it had entered one after another the vast white stone villages of Artois, tumbled in ruins from end to end, and it had sought a retiring and fleeing enemy, who seemed to intend to retreat for a great distance, though he remained capable, nevertheless, of holding up for a time, when he desired, three times his strength.

We had learned earlier in the day from men

in dressing-stations that small posts of machine-gunners were holding up the advance, that Lieutenant B—, a popular officer, who had been through the East African campaign before he came to us, was killed, and that several well-known sergeants had been brought down in the fighting.

The whole brigade, the whole division, many divisions were in movement, some progressing here, others and parts of others held up there. The designed course of the battle was in process of being realised point by point, though in places and for a time the plan broke down. Contact between the advancing units was generally kept up, though occasionally contact was lost—as when our brothers-in-arms in the brigade went forward unsupported on their left, and were surrounded and lost. "Intelligence" knew where every unit was and where it ought to be. The half-blasted woods, ruined villages, and indestructible hills and ridges did not hide the army from its eyes. Nevertheless, the task of marching over the broken ground and finding the point which our battalion had reached after the day's advance was no easy task. "I expect it to be the devil of a job," some one was heard to say.

We left at six o'clock, Captain E— and a brother-officer riding in front; a limber with some water for the battalion and some whisky to be left at brigade headquarters went between; a sergeant rode one of the limber horses, and five or six men marched behind.

At the outset we were confronted with a grand jam of traffic, caused by the slow progress of a queue of tanks over an awkward ridge of the road. Groups of officers, including some in gay uniforms with epaulettes of steel, including also clericals with their unwontedly white collars and their delicate hands, still yellow with the clay which they had been throwing on to corpses all the afternoon, stood on banks and looked down on the scene with evident relief and pleasure. The bare-kneed tank officers rushed hither and thither in their cotton knickers, and with irritation written on their sunburnt faces. Troops of all kinds swarmed about the scene, and we stood posed as in a *Graphic* picture.

“ Turn the limber about ; we can’t wait here longer,” said Captain E—, and the fat sergeant on horseback laboriously obeyed, cursing his officer the while for pretending to teach him his business. So we made a detour, all grumbling, the two officers silently going ahead.

It was evening. Twilight was descending on a broad moorland which was intersected with roads and old trenches. Dust on the road was more than ankle-deep, and we beat it up in clouds, so that it whitened us all and entered eyes and nose and mouth, and lay in a crust in the moustache ; and the same dust hung in curtains over the moor, it was high in the heavens like a mist, there were columns of it in the atmosphere, and the sun set strangely and pallidly because of it.

We passed the extraordinary ruins of a sugar factory, all tormented and twisted, still eighty

feet high, but terribly dilapidated, as it were warped, the body of the place disembowelled and the ruined machinery of the interior exposed, mingled with congealed liquefaction. And at sinister angle out of all this, at a great height, the undamaged shoulder of a crane. "A madman's design," thought I. "There is an idea in it, that is clear, but a maniacal notion of misshapenness instead of symmetry has found expression."

We passed the well-dug but battered British lines, which we had been long convinced as soldiers no enemy could take, and then in No Man's Land we saw the spectral figures of giant tattered aerodromes, long coveted as complete possessions by both sides, used by us constantly for night bombing-fliers until the German armies had flooded over all the country in the spring. Now we had them again.

We began to be a little unsure of the way. Still there was with us Mountjoy, who had come down from the line some hours before, and though there had been a further advance, he could still guide us with some surety. Nevertheless, we began to ask questions of passers-by. At late twilight we came to cross-roads, where but lately death had claimed his own, and now there was a traffic of motor-lorries only to be compared to what is seen at a street artery of a large city. Every lorry was white with dust, the horses' hoofs were deep in dust, and the drivers' faces and backs covered with it. There was an unwonted absence of talk.

Our road led across the German front line, which lay in indescribable confusion, without a soldier, without even a sentry, but with the odour of yellow-cross gas and of corruption. The stars came peeping through the dusty sky ; the great moon gained luminosity, whilst the eye, which had ranged far and wide over the battlefield, instinctively searching for dead, was narrowed in its scope to wayside borderlands.

Wounded men, in twos, helping one another, straggled past us to the rear. Exhausted men sat silent and limp on banks at the side of the road. Submissive, eternally patient German prisoners passed us, carrying stretchers with wounded on their shoulders, one armed guard for each squad of bearers. There was a rare simplicity about them, and seeing them in sharp silhouette against the sky, they looked like the sculptured figures of some marble tomb.

Darkness set in, but the moon above the battle-ruin illumined all and increased it in grandeur. Traffic grew less and less. Enemy bombing-machines droned overhead, and their bombs glared crimson and resounded in explosion far away in the darkness. The great guns were silent, but the aeroplanes, being little opposed, came down towards us, and swept the roads with machine-gun fire. So as not to be seen, we halted till the firing ceased.

We then entered a vast area of demolition, where the village of H— had been razed to the ground, and, kicking through the dust, went down its main street, on which once many windows

had looked, but now nought looked. It was as if God had visited it, and every man had fallen backward and broken his neck, and every house and home had fallen flat. No, not a wall stood, but hideous malefaction had boshed and bashed even that which was already useless. In contrast to all this, a small undamaged parlour-chair stood in a drift of dust at the cross-roads at the far end of the village—taken, who knows from where, and placed there in pity for the wounded.

We had been three hours on the road. We stood some minutes at that memorable crossing, and questioned various horsemen who arrived and went. There passed us a regular caravan of supply-tanks, much larger than the fighting size, but containing rations of petrol and water and supplies of ammunition. When we took the next road we found "Brigade," and two of our men were detached for duty there. And we obtained a runner who had the name of being an infallible guide, and his duty it was to lead us to where the battalion lay. With him we followed a column of machine-gun transport, and there began the most empty period of our march, empty because we were tired, and were haunted by the idea that we were going wrong. What happened to the transport ahead of us it is impossible to say, but we were indeed going wrong, and when we at length halted, there were only a few posts between us and the Germans. The infallible guide had led us amiss, and we retraced our steps several slow kilometres. It was now nearing eleven, and the enemy's guns

and ours opened fire, and the shells overhead screeched through the air in both directions. Various ammunition dumps were hit and burned up in red glares to the sky ; twinkling Very lights shot up and wavered in miniature constellations, and silver snake-lights hung a few moments and went out. Away on our left we heard the deliberate repetitions of a German machine-gun. But we plodded on and cursed and grumbled :

“ The horses will be nearly dead before we get back. . . . What’s the use of a hundred tins of water when the supply-tank can take four hundred. . . . Old man R— must be working for another bar to his medal sending us up with water. . . . I knew before we started out we’d get lost with that long devil taking us. And I’ve been twenty years in the army, and he thought he could teach me my business. . . . We’re not on the right track. I’m — well sure we’re not on the track. . . .”

But we were going right this time, and in half an hour came to a huge box-shaped standard of netted camouflage, two Red Cross waggons, stacks of petrol-tins, and a confusion of captured German arms. These marked the entrance to a vast hollow chamber in the earth, dug previously by the laborious Germans, and now used as our battalion headquarters. Twenty or thirty well-cut clay stairs led down to this great cavern, and on every step some one was stretched, asleep, while down below, where but lately German sabres had clanked, lay our Colonel and other officers sleeping too.

Captain E—— went down these many steps, and we with the limber continued our way by an exposed road to the point where one of the centre companies lay. The enemy shelled the road, and five minutes after we had started three of our men mechanically threw themselves flat in the road as a shell came right at us. But the shell did not explode. Another exploded to our right, sending a shower of smoking metal over us, and almost stunning us with the concussion. So we hurriedly dumped the cans at the side of the road, and the horses galloped back to headquarters as fast as they could be urged. There we sat and drank water from gallon petrol-tins and watched the wounded arriving at the Red Cross waggons. The full moon poured its light and its splendid midnight silence over all.

However, whilst we were waiting, an orderly came out to ask us to take a stretcher and bring down a dead officer lying where he had fallen. This was Lieutenant B——. We were not very eager because we were tired, but a guide came out, and we found a stretcher and followed him—first along a ravine and then over an exposed ridge where trenches had been partly dug. We all sat down and rested in an empty trench, and it was just midnight. A wounded man limped piteously up to us and asked the way to the aid post, and it was an old squad chum. “Hullo,” said he, the light of recognition in his eyes. It was C—— again, the boy who thought the South African War was fought in Egypt. He had got a “blighty one” from a fragment of shrapnel. We told

him where to go, and then for our part went on, threading the empty trench till we came to that part held by our men. Here were several dead, and we took the coverings off their faces and looked at each to find out which was that of Lieutenant B—. Last time I had seen the face it was pleasantly flushed with wine, and there was a glitter in the eyes ; his pale yellow moustache veiled rather witty lips. But now it was smeared with red dry blood, and the moustache was heavy in death. A fine tall fellow and a great weight dead.

For a moment our attention was diverted to a souvenir lying in the dirt, a small anti-tank rifle with a one-inch bore, and one wanted to put it on the stretcher with the dead man. But it was too heavy. So we shouldered the dead body of Mr. B— and began our slow journey to the limber. We changed hands and positions at least a dozen times whilst carrying it, and as German shells burst near us there was danger of the stretcher capsizing, for one of us was very nervous and wished to fall flat to earth every time the menacing buzz of a projectile assailed his ears. So the heavy, ill-balanced body swayed and lurched, registering the nervous tension and fatigue of those who bore it. We perspired and gasped. At length, at the entrance of the ravine, we halted and sat down. Since last we passed, a gas-shell had exploded, and as we sat with open mouths, panting, our throats burned with “yellow-cross.” Perhaps we ought to have put on our gas-masks, but with them on we could not

have found sure footing among the many holes, and no one wished to fall whilst holding the dead body.

At length, however, to the limber. And the dead body was roughly transferred from the stretcher to the wet bottom of the cart. The men had thought to sit themselves in that cart, but the dead had dispossessed them. There was no longer any talk of the tiring of the horses. A second small cart, the rear-half of the limber and the size of a barrow, was yoked behind the first, and into it we crammed and crowded our tired limbs. The officers reappeared and rode ahead, we followed. And now we must retrace most of our steps and recross once more the battlefields and trenches over which we had come whilst night was young. Happily we knew a good deal more of the way than we had done on coming. But we were not troubled ; we were resting. It was a marvellous summer night. There was time to appreciate that now—the moon remained over us in extraordinary splendour.

We developed a fair pace, and it did not seem to matter into what pits the limber fell or how it lurched, we righted ourselves and went on. The body in front of our eyes lay head lower than the feet, and the feet were upturned before us. We looked at the nails and the earth on the soles of the boots, and the thought flickered in the brain, “ He trod that earth in, he will never tread on it again ; instead, earth will press on him.” The body lay on its back and

moved ever so little, and yet seemed to be trying to make itself more comfortable now and then. And the horseman in front and we in the carts behind plunged among the gaunt silvery ruins of the village of H—.

“ How pathetic it is ! ” I thought, “ that in peace time this magical night would express itself in such a warm comfort of the soul, in the liquid music of the nightingale in the wood, in the chirping of crickets in the grass, in happy, peaceful hamlets. How differently the serene stars would have spoken to us then ! ” And I thought of nights in the past, and of nights in the radiant pages of books.

One house wall standing by itself amid the ruins took my eyes. It was a large tattered fragment of wall, and where an upper storey had adjoined, and once, perchance, a woman’s bedroom had been, was a six-feet round hole, splintered and roughened, as it were, by the knuckles of the ogre who had struck it. All about us were ruins, and our passage was as through Nineveh or Tyre in a perfect Eastern night, with the barren desert all around ; but the ruins were so new that one saw, as it were, the malice of the destroyer written over them. One smelt the comfort of homes that had been lately blasted away. What negation ! No, not the hand of God ! Here was expressed no wrath, but wantonness, ugliness, suicide, mania. To think how all would have been placidly slumbering at that hour, but instead, heaps and wildernesses of stones !

The fat sergeant who had cursed so violently came and sat on the side of the rear cart with his legs dangling down, and he looked at the corpse :

“ For two two’s I’d take those boots off and change with him,” said he, considering intently the quality of the boots of the dead officer.

“ Why, that’s what I’ve been thinking this last half-hour myself,” said the other sergeant who accompanied us, “ only it’s a bit risky.”

“ Why should he be buried in such good boots? An old pair of boots is just as good to be buried in. It’s a —— waste, and a waste to the country, too ! ”

“ Yes, it’s a waste ; a pair of boots like that would cost five pounds, not less.”

“ Somehow you can’t help feeling sorry for him,” said the second sergeant, who evidently had some qualms.

“ Oh, it’s come to him as it’s got to come to all. Just the same as any other man. I’m not sorry for him,” said the other.

So we passed on out of the village into the moor beyond, and saw in a vale all the long line of green and yellow tanks carefully disguised, and waiting for dawn and the resumed attack. We entered once more the old German lines, with all their signs of war and desolation.

The man called Mountjoy, sitting crouched in a corner of the limber, began telling us his story, how he was a South American, a volunteer from Buenos Ayres, but consumptive, and repeatedly refused by doctors ; how he had gone

on his knees to doctors and officers to get himself passed as fit, and at last, when standards were lowered, he managed, by telling the story of his enthusiasm, to get taken in the army. But once in France, how bitterly he repented ! How he knew what a fool he had been ! And his shadowy eyes burned with regret in his large, pale face. He described in broken English what a beautiful life there was at home ; told us his sorrows about his mother, whom he had grieved, and how he had wished to send his photograph to her but the Censor always refused it. He it was who had come down from the line earlier in the day and was doing double duty because he had known the way.

“ I ought to have four or five days clear after this,” he lisped hopefully.

“ Well, you must look after yourself, for nobody else will look after you in the army,” said the sergeant morosely.

“ Yes, that’s true.”

There was a silence.

“ I don’t suppose he ever travelled in that posture before,” said the sergeant reflectively, looking at the dead body. It now lay diagonally across the cart. And he smiled at the contrast, at the fine style of the living officer and this poverty-stricken way in which the same officer, now dead, was travelling.

“ . . . A heavy fellow . . . ”

And once more we were in a village where the hand of the maniac had been at work, and I thought of the ruins in the hearts of men. Oh

war, the brutaliser ! I thought of a contention of a very drunken soldier : "The war has reduced men below the level of the beasts that perish. To be unconcerned at Death is lower than the animal. War, I tell you, knocks all the religion out of a man."

I had held an opposite point of view.

Captain E—— told us as we lay in the cart that we must have some food before turning in. Then he galloped ahead, and we followed laboriously and creakingly through the stone-heaps of B—— to the flushing, flooding water-point, where we watered the patient and mute beasts who had carried us. I shall always feel kinder toward horses in memory of the many dead beasts we saw by the way that night, and for the fact that we were too tired not to ride.

So we brought the body of Mr. B—— to the lines at B——. Worthy M'K——, a barber of Perth, greeted us as we came in, and though it was not his task, he had taken charge of the kitchen for awhile, and had made tea both for the officers and for us. I put an arm round M'K—— as we walked to the kitchen. It was four in the morning, and the long strange night ended in gaiety and talking.

The body of our poor lieutenant lay outside. Next day it was carried further still, and buried where lay many others of our regiment in the growing graveyard of Berles au Bois. Curiously enough, Captain E—— was thrown from

his horse and badly injured ; the other officer got gassed ; Mountjoy, who pined for South America, died of pneumonia ; the sergeant who was so callous toward the dead officer died of influenza, and the driver and the other sergeant were suffocated in a cellar—all before Armistice day.

XI

AS TOUCHING THE DEAD

“WE were fighting in a rose-garden which was strewn with men who had been dead for some days. The pink roses and the green corpses were a strange combination,” said L——, the young poet who wrote charming lyrics and had such a taste in art. He was fresh to the work and looked on the dead for the first time. The memory was distasteful, and yet it inevitably recurred to his mind. He strove to banish it as an elegant person in civil life would naturally banish from the mind something evil and repulsive, such as, for instance, say, some beggar woman’s face that his eyes by chance had seen. I met the same L—— a month later ; we were discussing impressions of the war, and he confessed that he felt no interest in the dead as such ; they were just so many old cases of what had once been men. He had seen so many dead that already the instinctive horror had gone.

“They say Madame Tussaud offered a reward to any one who would sleep a night in the Chamber of Horrors, but I think I could do it,” said Dusty one night by a camp-fire. “I’ve

slept in dug-outs with dead men and been too tired to throw them out, and I've wakened to feel rats' breath on my cheeks. I think no wax-works could have terrors for me."

The greatest number of the soldiers had become indifferent to the horror of death, even if more intensely alive than before to the horror of dying themselves. In many an extraordinary callousness toward dead bodies was bred. They could kick a dead body, rifle the pockets of the dead, strip off clothing, make jokes about facial expressions, see waggon-wheels go over corpses, and never be haunted by a further thought of it. Only if the dead were British, or if it were known to you, the dead body of some one in the same regiment, there seemed to be a sadness and a coldness, a sort of presentiment that you yourself would perish before the end and lie thus in trench or battle-field, cold and inanimate, soaked with rain, uncared for, lost to home and dear ones.

But the German dead had no interest. They lay about everywhere unburied, for our own dead had precedence with the burying-parties. All along the devastated village streets the Germans lay dead as they had been shot down in action of flight, the look of running in fear was still on the brown faces, and the open mouth and white teeth seemed to betoken calls to their comrades as they ran. In the débris of the houses to which men rushed for souvenirs the dead lay too, with gentle empty faces, and ever so shabby shoddy tunics, and their little

round caps beside the subdued and thoughtless heads. Germans lay in the dusty gutters like old parcels, and men would turn them over to see the face that was biting the dust. When we were in the long ravine of Noreuil and Vaux-Vraucourt, the ridges and indeed the hollows of the ravine itself for miles round were strewn with dead. The air was heavy with putrefaction, and on either hand extended the battle-field, covered with wreckage and dug out with huge shell-holes. Discarded rifles, equipments, ration-tins, clothes, mouldy loaves of German bread, tins of corned-beef, drums of ammunition lay everywhere. Unexploded German bombs lay about in scores, and likewise packages of explosives for mining. The roads were scattered with unexploded cartridges, with hundreds of thousands of them, and shells of many calibres lay about in extraordinary promiscuity, and amidst all these the miserable dead lay where they fell, British and German, friend and foe. The long trenches that traversed the green fields were inhabited by corpses, and it was a pity to think of them lying long unburied, and of the souvenir-hunters handling them day by day and leaving them ever more bare.

I lived at that time for a fortnight in the midst of this wreckage of war. The dug-out which I had appropriated had been used by a German before me, and there was a half-finished sodden letter in it to a German mother, and there was a box of revolver ammunition. It was eight feet in length and a little deeper than a grave, and it

was dug out of bright yellow clay at the side of a sunken road. Parties of men went to and fro all the day along the way, and the way was one of running mud. The roof was made of planks thrown across, two German blankets, and a waterproof-cape detached from a set of equipment lying on the moorland above. There were five steps in the mud of the bank leading up to the dug-out, and these were made of German ammunition boxes full of machine-gun ammunition. There was a shelf which was an iron sleeper from the German light railway, a fireplace made of a provision-tin ; for table a German stool, and for seat two petrol-tins filled with dirt. Outside there were hundreds of strands of loose telegraph-wire which were wandering from their shattered posts, and on one of these, pegged down by two "buckshee" bayonets, a soldier's washing could be hung out to dry. Every morning there was enough water in the sagging waterproof-cape on the roof to wash in, and sometimes for a regimental shave. The sense of being surrounded on all sides by the dead never left one, and as I sat and looked out on the scene I saw displayed on a hillside a hundred yards distant the red and grey silhouettes of the ruins of Noreuil looking like some village in Palestine.

From this point I used the privilege of liberty which I had, and made expeditions to Queant and the Drocourt switch and to Bourlon Wood and Bourlon village, pulsating with the life of the British and French-Canadians who had just taken it, to Pronville and Mœuvres, and to

the trenches known as P and Q and R, where our battalion lay. The fascination of going from dead to dead and looking at each, and of going to every derelict tank, abandoned gun, and shattered aeroplane was so great that inevitably one went on further and further from home, seeking and looking with a strange intensity in the heart. I saw a great number of the dead, those blue bundles and green bundles strewn far and wide over the autumn fields. The story of each man's death was plainly shown in the circumstances in which he lay. The brave machine-gunners, with resolute look in shoulders and face, lay scarcely relaxed beside their oiled machines, which if you understood you could still use, and beside piles of littered brass, the empty cartridge-cases of hundreds of rounds which they had fired away before being bayoneted at their posts. Never to be forgotten was the sight of the dead defenders of Écoust lying there with all their gear about them. On the other hand, facing those machine-gunners one saw how our men, rushing forward in extended formation, each man a good distance from his neighbour, had fallen, one here, another there, one directly he had started forward to the attack, and then others, one, two, three, four, five, all in a sort of sequence, here, here, here, here, here ; one poor wretch had got far, but had got tangled in the wire, had pulled and pulled and at last been shot to rags ; another had got near enough to strike the foe and been shot with a revolver. Down at the bottom of deep trenches many dead

men lay, flat in the mud, sprawling along the duck-boards or in the act of creeping cautiously out of holes in the side. In other parts of the field one saw the balance of battle and the Germans evidently attacking, not extended, but in groups, and now in groups together dead. One saw Germans taking cover and British taking cover in shell-holes inadequately deep, and now the men stiff as they crouched. I remember especially two of our fellows in a shell-hole, fear was in their faces, they were crouching unnaturally, and one had evidently been saying to the other, "Keep your head down!" Now in both men's heads was a dent, the sort of dent that appears in the side of a rubber ball when not fully expanded by air. There were those who had thought their cover inadequate and had run for something better and been caught by a shell on the way—hideous butcheries of men; and there were men whose pink bodies lay stripped to the waist and some one had been endeavouring to save them and had abandoned them in death—men with all their kit about them, men without kit, men with their greatcoats on and men without greatcoats.

The nearer one approached to the battle-lines the less touched the dead appeared. But those near our encampment at Noreuil all lay with the whites of their pockets turned out and their tunics and shirts undone by the souvenir-hunters—which brings me once more to the general relationship of the average living soldier to the dead. I remarked that though those in the battle-line were very swift in the pursuit of the so-called souvenir,

in other words, in pursuit of the loot, it was those behind, such as the artillerymen and labour corps, who were the authentic human crows. I used to walk a mile or so every evening to the five derelict tanks which lay on the sky-line on the way towards Queant and I got to know the dead on the way, and I watched them daily grow more and more naked as successive waves of souvenir-hunters went over them. There was a handsome German some six feet three, very well clothed, and the first time I saw him he was as he had fallen. Then his boots went—he had a good pair of boots. Then his tunic had been taken off. A few days later he was lying in his pants with many parts of the dead body exposed.

I came home late one evening and fell in with a man from one of the sixty-pounder batteries at Queant. He was grubbily but methodically examining the corpses of the German machine-gunners and hoping to pick up a revolver. I watched him examine one without success and he gave the dead body a kick. "The dirty barsted," said he, as if he were accusing the corpse, "somebody's bin 'ere before me."

The revolver or automatic pistol was the best prize of the souvenir-hunter. Money was sought, and watches and rings. There is something gruesome in the act of taking a marriage ring or even an ordinary ring from a dead man's hand and then wearing it or giving it to be worn in England. But very few German dead were left with rings, and the Roman Catholics were despoiled of their crosses. The legitimate tokens

to take were the brightly coloured numerals from the shoulders of tunic or greatcoat, the officers' helmets (not the saucepans but the Alexander-the-Greats), field-glasses, pocket-books, etc. But the hope of each seeker was the pistol.

I was wandering through a shattered and deserted military camp one morning and a questing Major burst upon me. I saluted, but he brushed formality aside. "Hello, hello," says he, "is it true that your regiment has a special privilege to look for automatic pistols?"

I looked demure in the presence of such exalted rank and the Major regarded me searchingly.

"I'm out to give fifty francs for every automatic pistol I can pick up," said he. And that was a plain hint to me that if I could sell he would buy.

He was Major in a regiment impolitely referred to by our haughty Spartans as a "grabby mob."

There must have been many men who were not as lacking in imagination and impressionability as the majority who ranged o'er the battle-field seeking for treasures. But I did not myself meet these. Even the best saw nothing in taking away any property which might remain with the dead. Such property was no good to corpses. It was curious what a great number of letters, both British and German, lay on the battle-field. These had been taken out of the pockets and pocket-books of the dead and since they were no use had been thrown to the winds—literally to the winds, for when the wind rose they blew

about like dead leaves. There were photographs, too, prints of wife or sweetheart, of mother, or perchance of baby born whilst father was at the war—the priceless, worthless possessions of those whose bodies lay on the altar.

It never seemed to me worth while to collect lurid mementoes such as helmets or bombs, but I often designed to make a representative collection of the letters both German and British which were lying about one's feet. I read many of them ; though there was something almost intolerably tragic in the hopes and fears and boasts and presentiments of those who had written to men who were in truth destined to be killed. Many, many of the letters said some one was sorry that letters had not been written, but promised to write longer and oftener. Many letters were full of admonitions to be careful, not to take risks. Others promised "leave soon," "home for Christmas," "the war over." Some told stories of the air raids on London ; others were full of domestic details and never mentioned the war. Some obviously endeavoured to keep cheery because it had been said the men needed cheerful letters, but others refused to be reconciled to the separation which the soldier's going to the Front had meant. Perhaps they might have sounded trite and ordinary, but as being written to those who were about to die, it seemed as if Fate read them also and smiled in malice.

I had a suspicion that many of the dead who lay unburied for so long were not reported dead—but simply as "missing." So in one case

where several letters lay strewn round a corpse whose pockets were inside out, I took one crumpled missive and sent it to the writer of it with a carefully written note about the young lad's fate. In answer I received a letter from the father asking for definite news of his son if I had any, as he had not been heard of for a long while. Whatever reply I sent, would I please send it to his business address, not to his home, as the mother was so anxious. By that time, however, the boy's body with seven others had been put into one hastily dug grave; the names, but not the units nor the numbers, had been printed on the one cross. I then informed the father of his son's death and of the exact locality of the grave. In due course of time the father replied that I must be mistaken, for his son had been reported as wounded and missing. I wrote no more, but I formed the opinion, which was afterwards completely confirmed, that "missing" very often meant *dead and unburied*, and that an unburied British soldier if he belonged to a unit which had passed on was almost inevitably reported "missing." Burying was such a tedious job when it had to be done as a fatigue by a party not really responsible for burying, that it was done in the most rough-and-ready way.

War robs the individual soldier of reverence, of care except for himself, of tenderness, of the hush of awe which should silence and restrain. War and the army have their own atmosphere, in which some one else being dead, as much as

killing some one else, succeeds in being trivial and even upon occasion jocular. Two sergeants going out for a stroll came upon a German corpse with the steel helmet right down over the eyes. One of them lifted up the helmet in order to see the face properly. A saturnine gloom was on the lips and this had been intensified by the masking of the eyes. When the sergeant lifted the helmet it pulled up the flesh with it, and the upper lip rose from over the ivory teeth with a ghastly grin. "Take that smile off your face," said the sergeant, and let the helmet drop back over the eyes again. And they laughed. In these and in so many, imagination and sensitiveness were swallowed up by war. But another soldier, new to war's horrors, came upon a Royal Scot lying dead on a ridge. Beside the corpse was a packet of note-paper and envelopes which some souvenir-hunter searching his kit had forgotten to take. The soldier was just in need of note-paper and envelopes to write home, and he took this packet away from that dead man.

All that night and for many days he seemed to hear the tiny, tiny voice of the corpse saying or rather whining in his ear, "You've stolen my note-paper and envelopes," grudging them and demanding them back,—as if the dead were misers.

But the soldier did not return the stationery to the place where he found it, and after a while his mind seemed to harden and take on a sort of crust. He had been haunted by the faces of the dead, and then these faces ceased to haunt him, and he had obtained the soldier's peace of mind.

The greatest and perhaps the only consoling truth which can be learned from the expression of the dead is that a corpse has very little to do with a living body. The dead body is sacred, but it is not the person who died. That person has mysteriously disappeared. The look of the dead body, its shrunken individuality as compared with that of a live man, must have partly caused the great vogue of spiritualism—that look might be taken as part of the evidence of immortality. That was the chief positive impression which I obtained. For the rest, the whole matter was infinitely pathetic. There were one or two of us who felt there would always, ever after, be a cast of sadness in us because of what we had seen. I felt how inhuman we had been to one another. How could we come at last to Our Father with all this brothers' blood upon our hands?

“Europe, Europe!” I thought; “what a picture might be painted of Europe, the tragic woman, with bare breasts, anguished eyes, but no children.—*Oh, Europe, where are thy children?*”

XII

PADRES AND OFFICERS

OUR battalion possessed one Church of England priest who was serving in the ranks, Sergeant L—, who afterwards became the quartermaster-sergeant of the Company to which I belonged. He only came to France in August, and when I saw him first, whilst I did not know he was a priest or an educated man, I took him merely to be a quiet sergeant with rather less personality than his exuberant confrères. He had a passion for the game of chess, and used to ask each new person he met whether he played. When he discovered that I knew the moves—I was perhaps the only man in our ranks who did know them—he felt irresistibly drawn to inventing the means of playing. There is no greater social enemy of man than the chess fiend, and I watched him with apprehension mark out a chequer work of sixty-four black and white squares on the three-legged stool in my dug-out at N—. But the game of chess was the means of my knowing much about his character and history.

We had an original set of pieces. The white rooks were white buttons from the pull-strings of

stick bombs ; the knights were part of the detonators of hand-grenades ; the perfect bishops came out of the internal structure of German egg bombs ; the queens were the unscrewed nosecaps of shells. It seemed natural to refer to the white queen as the "mobled queen" in the player's phrase. The kings were anti-tank cartridges ; the black pawns were the black cordite tablets used as charges for heavy guns, and the white pawns were the bright yellow circles of material sometimes discoverable in unexploded star-shells. Sometimes revolver ammunition or parts of German respirators did duty, and the pieces in general were a motley crew. We took a great interest in evolving a set of men for both sides, and changed the personnel so often it was somewhat of a mental feat to keep in mind who was who upon the board.

So we played chess and he told me his story. He had been a volunteer at the time of the Boer War, and when that war was over had remained in the army for some time. Being of a religious turn of mind he was always a man apart. He left the army eventually to study, but he had by that time had six years of army life and had attained sergeant's rank. He went to college and had rapid success in study, but he told me he found the atmosphere of the theological college very much less pleasant than that of the army. In the army there was much coarseness and brutality of thought and conversation, but men were more or less ashamed of it. But at college the men prided themselves on their nasty stories and a sort of coarse and

cynical point of view, which nevertheless they did not quite attain, and they were ashamed of their respectability. He was more lonely among the students than he had been in the army. However, he progressed very well in theology, took a good degree, and was ordained. He obtained a living in Surrey and had a full life there. But when the war with Germany commenced he felt the call of the army again, and at once gave up his clerical duties and volunteered for the Front. Then, as often happened in the army to enthusiasts of his kind, he was kept in the training battalion at home and not sent to France until the initial enthusiasm had cooled. Though he had been practically the whole of the war in khaki it was only August 1918 that saw him in France.

I soon learned that he was very much pained at the brutality of the conversation, which was so much worse at the Front than at home, or than it had been in the Boer War, and he found difficulty in accommodating his mind to the flow of brutal talk which assailed his ears day and night. He was also much horrified at the way men spent their Paris leave. Leave was being granted regularly at that time for men to go to Paris to enjoy themselves, and such leave was often little more than a trip to the houses of ill-fame. For an illiterate soldier there was little other interest in Paris except low pleasure.

L—— was known generally by the nickname of "Creeping Barrage," for he habitually looked out of the top of his eyeballs through his lowered

eyebrows, and had a sort of spectral glide forward when he walked towards you. It was really a clerical gaze, and his face had set in it and would not change.

His adventures with us were interesting in themselves. Being a man of education he was not likely to be popular, and being also, as every one knew, a clergyman in civil life, most thought he must be a bit of a fool. With the private soldiers, as he was stern though just, he did not have much trouble, but his colleagues of the same rank were more difficult, and set out to make a fool of him. The officers with whom he came in contact generally assumed that because he was a clergyman he must be incompetent, and gave him a great deal of blame when anything went wrong. I think he gradually won them over. When he first appeared, several thought he was a Baptist minister. When they found out he was Church of England, it made such a difference. He was, however, in himself a fine man in most ways ; very athletic, an indefatigable marcher, ready to carry any amount of stuff, his own and other people's, on his back. He was not afraid of anything, he neither drank nor smoked, and did not use bad language, and he lived according to his religious principles.

Those who had known him in England said that he knelt every night by his barrack-room bed in prayer before he lay down to sleep.

Though he was laughed at for many things, he was, in secret and sometimes also openly, greatly admired because he lived what he had preached.

"I will say this about the Creeping Barrage," said one: "He lives the life."

¶ "The only Christians we ever had in this battalion," said an old soldier, "were Q.M.Sgt. L— and M—. As for L—, he lives the life of a Christian, which is what cannot be said of many who are paid to live it. And M—, when he was ordered to place his own brother under arrest, refused to do so, preferring rather to lose his stripes"—another battalion story.

I could not help feeling that L— was a great spiritual gain, and that his life, though he never preached or "saved souls," or betrayed by any act that he was a priest, nevertheless made a deep impression on men's minds.

I do not think that he regarded himself as in any way a priest whilst he was in khaki. He was, I believe, somewhat of a sacramentarian and "High Church." His Christian character was natural, it was not a priestly matter. But to the men character was everything in religion. I remember my astonishment one day when a man next whom I slept in a tent told me he was not a Christian—he drank and smoked and used bad language, he was sorry to say; he'd often wanted to get clear of these bad habits, but he confessed they were too much for him, so he was obliged to remain "not a Christian."

"But a man can drink and swear and still remain a Christian," said I.

"Oh no," he insisted; "it's not going to church that makes the Christian—it's living well."

And that was the general army point of view. Christianity was character and it was conduct.

Now our padres did not exhibit character. They preached, they spoke to the men, they were saluted and respected. But whilst the men lived a hard life, and each, as it were, carried a cross, the padres, being officers, lived at ease ; and whereas the men had poor food, they ate and drank in the company of the officers. I could not help feeling how badly handicapped the padres were.

We had had one chaplain who had done excellent work : he had comforted the wounded and the dying, been often under fire and in danger, and yet never turned a hair ; a man who cared little for his rank as such and was concerned exclusively with God's service. He was by no means the fighting parson or the sporting padre that the men are supposed to like, but his name was never mentioned without affection and admiration. This was Captain M——. There were others also who won the men's esteem, but my impression was that in the war chaplains' work had failed of its object.

They could not preach the Sermon on the Mount because they thought loving your enemies contrary to the spirit of the war. They could not inveigh against lust because the medical officer was of opinion that Nature's needs must be satisfied. They could not attack bad language because it was accepted as manly. They could not attack drunkenness because it was the men's relaxation, and a good drinker was considered a

good fighter. What was there for a poor padre to say to the men?

But life at the Front exposed men to many more temptations than did the old life at home. The men succumbed to them. Sexual intercourse was regarded as a physical necessity for the men. Besides being the medical point of view, it became the official army point of view as well, and we were often told in lectures that it was natural, and all we had to do was to use the safeguards and preventatives which were at our disposal to save us from disease. The padre could not go and reason with the men who upon occasion were to be seen in queues outside the houses with red blinds. Hundreds of thousands of men who had led comparatively pure lives until they saw France learned and were even encouraged to go with impure women. As many learned to drink and to get drunk. I know purity has little to do with religion, and that the first thing to obtain is a loving and humble heart, but the British working man can only apprehend religion from the point of view of moral behaviour, and in his opinion "religion is a wash-out."

I met whilst I was in France some ten or twelve chaplains. They all had pleasant personalities, and it was a relief to converse with them after the rough-and-ready wit of the men. I saw them from a different angle from that in which they were seen by the officers. What struck me most about them was the extraordinary way they seemed to make their minds fit to the official demands made

upon opinion. They always rapidly absorbed the official point of view about the war, and often the officers' point of view as well.

They based their opinions on the leaders in *The Times*, and they thought the *Morning Post* a little bit wild and the *Daily News* bolshevik. They ate Germans for breakfast, tea, and supper, and were often more bloodthirsty than the men. One or two of them drank whisky with gusto, and spoke the gaudy language of the army. "Graham," said one, "if there's one thing more than another that is important in this war, it is that the whisky supply should not get low." One whom I knew well was an extraordinary believer in discipline, quite a Prussian in his way, and liked men to stand to attention when speaking to him, and say "Sir" and the rest. He told me he had a physical loathing for the Hun, and was ready to see the whole race, man, woman and child, exterminated. I protested that God made the German, that though he was our foe he was human and was entitled in our thoughts to human dignity. Thereupon ensued a conversation made bitter on his side, and I had to withdraw as gently as I could.

The men, whilst they liked those who talked to them of home, were cold towards them in the matter of religion. For the chaplains did not live the Christian life in any pictorial or dramatic way. The men no doubt thought that as servants of God they should be angels of mercy and light. They expected them to stand out in extraordinary contrast to the ugliness of

war. The man like L—— in his silent service and duty did far more to give the battalion a sense for religion.

That brings me to a conclusion, and it is that in any future great organisation of our manhood I think more could be done if it were decided to abolish the military rank of chaplains. They are not captains. And such titles as Colonel the Reverend or Brigadier-General the Reverend are almost ridiculous. I know there would be a terrible ordeal to go through, but it seems the spiritual needs of the army would be better served if candidates for chaplaincy were trained in the ranks, and did duty with their brothers, only being excused and given special privilege when they were needed in the special function of priests. Then they might be brought out to take a service or to bury the dead, and might be made stretcher-bearers during a fight. It would perhaps be a test of professing Christianity too terrible to ask nowadays. And yet I am convinced that the priest in that position would find himself nearer to the heart and soul of the soldier than he can be as an officer.

XIII

THE GREAT ADVANCE

THE final great advance was caused by the defeat of the Germans in mid-July on their Soissons-Château-Thierry flank, consequent upon the abortive bid for Paris. In that victory of Marshal Foch, the French General not only won a battle but a war, and he demonstrated to the mind of the German Staff that Teutonic resources would not stretch to Paris, and that in fact there were not enough German soldiers to hold the greatly extended battle lines which then obtained. It must suddenly and for the first time, and yet finally, have become indisputably clear that the vast German dream of victory could not be realised. The option constantly before the German eyes had been World-Power or Downfall. Now only downfall began to be left to them.

Not only was the hope of victory lost, but suddenly the danger of complete defeat confronted the German. His armies were perilously insecure. His skill in the rapid transfer of troops from one sector to another became of no avail ; for when he had brought the Franco-American

advance to a standstill on the River Vesle, his line immediately gave way in the Montdidier sector. He therefore made a large decision—to evacuate his newly-gotten gains and return to the Hindenburg system of defences. Such a retreat as ensued was very trying to the morale, and it gave birth to the Spartacus movement in the army—the revolt at last of the military slaves. However, from a military point of view the decision to go was creditable to the German mind, and the skill with which the operation was carried out won a good deal of praise, though neither the decision nor the skill with which it was realised could rob the whole matter of its intense significance in change of fortune. For with it the Allies entered upon their victorious rôle.

The German retreat began in the southern sectors of the line and spread northward. The enemy's guns were moved back and also the main bodies of the armies. Once the Germans were well under way with their plans for evacuation little was done to harass them. Each sector seemed to wait until the enemy had to all intents gone, and then our troops made an advance. A telling attack by our Division could no doubt have been made weeks earlier, but they were held back till the main body of the enemy had got away. Three months' more or less continuous fighting ensued, and all these three months we fought delaying parties and isolated machine-gun posts, or we stormed fortified villages or strongly-held sections of dominant trench or half-constructed pill-boxes. As far as our section of the advance

was concerned we were never near obtaining a general engagement with the enemy or a large capitulation of his forces. Our progress was a taking over, after rather bitter encounters with enemy rearguards, what the Germans had evacuated.

The proceedings opened in late August when a test raid was carried out under the charge of Mr. B—, who perished afterwards in the early days of the advance. It was a remarkable noiseless raid, and was said to have been perfect in its way. Volunteers had been asked for, and many fellows were found eager for the affair, though none could say how much or how little danger there was in it. My bold Fitz of Virginia volunteered—saw himself winning a V.C. or in any case distinction of some kind. The party was twenty-two in all. They were to go out armed mainly with clubs, like savages. These clubs were made specially for them by our pioneers. They were made of the iron part of Mills hand-grenades clamped to entrenching tool handles. One sharp blow on the head from one of these and your enemy needed no more. The raiders carried no rifles. There was no artillery or machine gunnery helping them from behind. They wore no helmets or Service caps, but tight bags of stockingette over their hair ; their faces were blackened so as not to catch the light of the stars, their hands also.¹ All were practised to stealthy silent movement, and all thirsted for

¹ Also for the purpose of readily recognising an enemy. If you see a white man you know at once he's not on your side.

German blood in a particular sort of way, and felt themselves curiously at home in this adventurous tribe which had been formed.

Shortly after midnight they crossed No Man's Land together and started on their eerie quest, all together, all silent, all nursing short clubs and ready to beat down an enemy at the slightest alert—over the dark, shell-torn ground, under the pale stars, silence and stealth. . . .

If they had been detected by the enemy ahead a German machine-gun might have mown all down in one revolution. So in the tense minds of the raiders ranged constantly the possibility of mischance. But they made no mistakes, they carried the raid out perfectly, and reached with great trepidation the German wire. But if occasionally a man got caught on that and stirred the rusty barbs no sniper brought him down from the vantage ground beyond. For the Germans whom we had believed to be there all the summer were gone. They had stolen away to the rear leaving behind them only isolated sentries and runners.

The whole length of the shell-stricken gulleys seemed empty ; the dug-outs were all dark. It was impossible to be sure in the night whether there were not enemies hidden away in the depths of the dug-outs, and our black men with their clubs dare not explore such places. But as they had been charged to bring prisoners in they went on.

They crept silently over the back of the German front line and went on till at last they

discovered an enemy post. There was a sentry and his relief waiting silently, but seeing and suspecting nothing. Six men flew at them and pounded their heads with the clubs and down went one Fritz all of a heap. One was killed, the other bruised and overwhelmed. They stripped the former of "souvenirs," each of the new men being eager to get a token to take home by and by ; the other German they dragged along with them : he must suffice as prisoner and be interrogated for intelligence. Poor fellow, he was too near dead to go straight, and he whimpered as they kept prodding him on with their clubs. They got him entangled on the wire, moreover, and had difficulty in pulling him off. They brought him to Headquarters, but he seemed too exhausted to speak and they carried him to the medical officer who made some acid remarks, for Fritz was dead.

However it was considered a highly successful raid ; there were no casualties on our side, and Mr. B——, who by God's will was not destined to live another month, was very much praised. I was told this type of raid was introduced by the Canadians who had the instinct and the idea of it from the North American Indians.

The secret was then thoroughly out—that the Germans had gone and were going back everywhere. Very soon all the transport accompaniment of fighting on a large scale began to throng the roads, and the decision to attack the enemy had matured. Had the main body of the enemy's troops confronted us it is unlikely that we should

have been allowed to advance. But the situation was guaranteed against accident, and the first day's progress was more in the nature of a picnic than a battle. Still the enemy knew also that we had begun to move forward as he retired. He also had his "intelligence," and had devised means for our delay at critical points in the country. It was said that his rear-guards were composed entirely of volunteers or in any case of picked men. They certainly comported themselves very well and saved innumerable lives to Germany. It seems, however, difficult to believe that they had volunteered. There was so much indiscipline and discontent in the German Army that one could hardly have expected that many would have been ready to offer themselves for such heroic service.

These rear-guards were met with the utmost ferocity by our troops who made short work of them whenever they got near them with the bayonet. But on the other hand the soldiers of these rear-guards, skilfully posted as they were, behaved in a very gallant manner and caused a great deal of slaughter and delay before they perished or surrendered. Perhaps with more military skill our armies could have accounted for them more speedily and with less suffering. The exploits of the autumn of 1918, whilst they redound to the heroism of our soldiers, did not seem to show great military genius at work behind us. We had a good cause and our morale was good, and we had large numbers and many guns, but did not trust to brain. The organisation of

the transport was obviously weak and the enemy was never pressed. On the German side there was a bad cause, a weakening morale, not large numbers, and comparatively few guns, but a good organisation of transport and plenty of brain work. The whole autumn campaign was Brain versus Cause and the Cause won. No matter what blunders our leaders made the common soldier always felt the cause was good. But the German did not believe in his cause, was not ready to suffer for it any more and lapsed into indiscipline. There was a steady decline in discipline throughout September and October. Had the Germans been able to resist with as much individual tenacity on the 1st of November as on the 1st of September there had been no armistice.

The methods of attack employed by our boys were quite straightforward ; we were first held up by the machine-gunners in the formidable Banks Reserve. The Germans ought to have been surprised by rapid night assault or gassed or enveloped or raided by tanks, but it was more or less left to our brave fellows to rush in broad daylight a fully-prepared enemy. The tanks were evidently the machine-gunners' worst enemy. Not that they feared a solitary tank or an isolated one, for by the concentrated fire of several machine-guns on one tank the latter could always be put out of action. But a whole series of tanks moving forward in a crocodile queue was the worst menace the machine-gunners knew. But the distribution and supply of tanks was not

nearly adequate for a true economy of lives. There were not enough, or they got lost, or couldn't be got up in time. There was, therefore, no rapid success for us at those prepared positions. The enemy held on two days and thus enabled his main army to get beyond the canals (Du Nord and St. Quentin) and to organise further delaying action there. There were heavy losses suffered by the attackers, especially by the Bill-Browns, whose discipline, courage, and fame committed them then, as ever, to doing the impossible in human heroism and endurance. I lost a whole series of comrades and friends wounded or killed. C—, who had filled up a blank file next to me at Little Sparta was killed ; S—, recruited from the S.E. Railway, a jolly, happy, middle-aged man, who always hailed me as Steve and had a cheery word, was killed. H—, the American boy who used to dance all night at New York, was wounded. Six sergeants with whom I was more or less acquainted were killed, and several other old soldiers and new recruits. The Division went out of action to obtain reinforcement and reorganise. The Bill-Browns could not make up their numbers and were therefore partly repleted from the survivors of the Battle of Hazebrouck Road, the heroic 4th Brigade.

Of those who came through the fight unhurt a word might be said of B—, the American actor from St. Louis, who played the part of Hamlet. He came up against the military machine in France and was continually in the guard-room for

insubordination or the like. It began with the subject of his wife's death in America. A dour sergeant said to him one day on parade, "I suppose you know your wife's dead." And in that way he learned the sad news. He took offence at this piece of brutality and got the sergeant into trouble. Then the sergeant became acting sergeant-major, and B—— could do nothing right, and was punished, punished, punished—never out of punishment. But he did well whenever the battalion went into action and distinguished himself at Banks Reserve. He was extremely quick-witted and certainly brave. It was his tongue and his lack of patience that got him into trouble. But he knew German, and obtained intelligence in the line, and was very serviceable.

However, the very fact of his knowing German and talking it volubly caused him to be eyed with suspicion by the illiterate old soldiers.

Fitz and I were talking together afterwards, and a knot of others came near us and began discussing B——.

"All he is, is a dirty spy. What he wants is the firing-party, and put him up against a wall."

Fitz jumped up as if shot. "What's that you say? He's no spy. Damn it, who said he was a spy?"

And he was ready to fight. But the canny old soldier who said it looked sour and was silent.

No, B—— was a fine fellow. A bit too fond of talking, but an interesting boy all the same, and I was sorry for him.

We rested in the old reserve lines near R——, now become strangely calm since all our guns had gone ahead. A week later our progress was resumed, and we marched back to Banks Reserve, through St. Leger, north of Écoust and Noreuil, to within sight of Bourlon Wood, and the approximation of two great highways to Cambrai. It was an easy advance over a conquered wilderness. Here the calamity of war showed its worst. The villages were flat or pounded to heaps of brick-dust and mud ; conical rubbish heaps marked the sites of churches ; by garden flowers growing wild amid débris you realised that homes had once been beautiful there. The land lay uncultivated for leagues, and had degenerated to moorland. And it was wilder than any moor, pitted by shells and gnarled with rusty wire. The atmosphere of France seemed taken away, and a new atmosphere, as of some vast waste continent, had been supplied. Thus possibly France looked in the time of Caesar's wars or before. But the neat, tended, civilised land of to-day had disappeared. There was something strangely depressing about this part of our advance. Perhaps it was the odour of so many unburied dead. The Germans lay tumbled all along the way, some biting the dust with their sodden faces ; others lying on their backs and showing gleaming teeth to heaven. Our own British dead also lay around, and could not be buried for lack of labour. And possibly more horses than men lay dead and decayed, and were eaten by the rats, and shrank in rain and sun

and could not get buried. Noreuil, Lagnicourt, Mœuvres were all in that state, as were also Queant and Pronville, and many other war ruins into which our boys adventured. It seems surprising now what good health every one enjoyed despite the general decay.

Meanwhile the Germans retired, and we were in light engagements near Mœuvres and the Canal du Nord, and held the line in alternation with our brother regiments.

We all thought there would be a great battle for Cambrai, that we should make a vast attack, something resembling the large German offensive of the spring and summer. We were harassed by the German defence, and felt we must at all costs break through the system—heap confusion after confusion on our enemies—or else a winter stagnation would set in. An opinion began to be current that we should chase the enemy all the autumn and all the winter too.

We took the Canal du Nord, and it was observed that the enemy had no intention of holding Cambrai, and we took the Canal de St. Quentin. In this latter action “Gurt,” the New York butler, met his death. As I have said, he was an honest and industrious and simple Christian, never using bad language and always ready to help a friend. He did not arrive at the front till September, yet with so little time to go before the armistice he perished. His platoon was moving in single file over dangerous country. One of his comrades, D—, had fallen, and Gurt, going back to try and bandage him and

stanch his wound, found his comrade (one of the same old squad) was past all help, and therefore returned. On his way back a sniper's bullet sped through his brain. So he went past us with one clear, noble action. I always felt a soft spot in my heart for Gurt. When I got to France at Easter, I found written on the inside of the chin-strap of my steel helmet, "With the best of wishes for your safe return," signed by him. When he died I felt somehow that "coming after me he had been preferred before me." He was the right sort. We could do with more "Gurts" in this world.

Whilst we were in the canal some visited the grey ruins of Mœuvres. I went up to Bourlon Wood and saw the wonderful village with its long red chateau like a palace, and the enigmatical church showing exposed its inwards of lath and plaster and the decayed vitals of its altar. Terrific effects had been wrought by the artillery ; whole frameworks of roofs seemed to have been removed as by one blast and deposited in the streets—such streets, one mass of red-brick débris and grey splinters of wood and iron.

The battalion was accommodated in and about the Canal du Nord as a place of rest, though but lately it had been the line of battle. It was now entirely in our hands, and was a mass of military débris. Our neighbours among those red-brick canal walls were the Highland Light Infantry, a party of whom had but lately at Mœuvres held this ground so heroically, attracting universal comment and laudation. It was

rather touching to see this canal, which had never held water, made into a series of barracks divided by the demolished bridges and locks. A series of grand iron bridges had once spanned it and each had subsided, crumpled and torn, into the canal bed. In the canal walls were German dug-outs and destroyed machine-gun nests. Over the "parapet" were many brick-kilns, where the German industrial company which had been building this canal previous to the outbreak of war had been baking their bricks.

One of the Americans got a "Blighty one" at this time. This was a policeman from Philadelphia, sometimes called Bigsey and sometimes Mrs. Wiggs. He, Fitz, and H— had come over on the boat to England together, and sworn to remain inseparables in the war. But Mrs. Wiggs got worried by the tales of horror, and volunteered to take a signalling course, so postponing his going to the front. By this means he escaped the Easter drafts. He only joined us in the reserve lines at R—. But he did not stay long. A new man was knocking in a tent-peg with an unexploded German bomb. It went off and wounded three. Mrs. Wiggs got a fragment in his hip, but it was enough; it served, and Mrs. Wiggs was soon back in London again at the reserve battalion. But it was not a time of many casualties, and the number of prisoners coming in suggested the cheaper gains that we were making through the falling-off of enemy discipline. German prisoners kept streaming down along the great highway, and these

were accommodated in the reservoirs of the canal a thousand at a time. We stood high above the reservoir near our lines, and looked down upon a thousand Germans all waiting—as if for a train to take them out of it all.

On Sunday there was a church-parade for our fellows and service in the canal itself.

During this period Bulgaria surrendered, and the overwhelming victories over the Turks were obtained. Our men had little reliable news, but rumour was rife. Numerous talks with German prisoners disclosed a more dispirited state of the enemy. We heard much of the chances of revolution in Germany ; of Turkey and Austria, both having “ thrown in their mits ” as the current jargon phrased it. And it is true we felt we were winning. Still, the soldiers were far from realising or believing in the near chance of obtaining complete victory. It was left to the next stage in our advance to kindle a genuine flame of hope in which to live, instead of the glimmer of the old will-o’-the-wisps of the war.

When on October 7 we marched forward once more one of the most romantic moments of the war was at hand.

Havrincourt, near which we spent the night of the 7th, was complete desolation ; Ribecourt was no better, but Marcoing was a trifle less smashed, and gave the impression of having been a rather pretty town in peace-time. We spent the night of the 8th on the ridge between

Marcoing and Masnières. It was very cold, with a hoar frost on the grass, and the men, expecting to go into action on the morrow, slept as best they could in old machine-gun emplacements and ditches. On the 9th we heard that Germany had accepted President Wilson's fourteen points, and on this day, too, we began to see new types of landscapes. We had passed through the zone of destruction, and were emerging into the comparatively unharmed regions which had remained in German hands since 1914, where the fields were ploughed and harvests had been taken, where the villages had red roofs, and the spires were on the churches.

The last village to show signs of being badly battered was Crevecœur—Heartbreak Village—and there also were many German and British dead, the latter being chiefly New Zealand men. All the way to Seranvillers there had been hard fighting, and the German gunners lay piled on their machines. On October 10, however, we swung clear of the old desolation altogether, coming to Esturmel. We learned that Cambrai had fallen and that the whole campaign was going well, and the enemy on his knees seeking for peace. The battalion did not need to go into action, for the tentative objective marked out for them had been abandoned without a shot. It was billed for the next day instead. The hour of setting off for the line was fixed for one in the morning. But, housed in a jolly village, the men made a most joyous night of it with feasting, singing, and merriment. Lights shone in all

windows, and from end to end of the village was music and hilarity. Indeed, out in the middle of the main street one fellow was sitting at a piano, and a crowd was round him singing catches. Near by the pipers were playing. In another billet there was a whistling chorus. Those who wished to rest reclined on mattresses on spring beds. Supper in the cottage with a section of a platoon round a regular family table, the fire burning merrily in the stove, the wall-clock ticking and striking, the faces of French villagers looking out from faded portraits on the walls, made a strange impression, but a good one. Next day the battalion went into action from St. Hilaire.

On Friday October 11, at one in the morning, the battalion marched forth out of Esturmel, and with the usual impedimenta of "fighting order" on their shoulders, swung through the prosperous coal-mining and weaving villages and townlets of Carnières, Boussières, St. Hilaire. At St. Hilaire they loaded rifles and fixed bayonets at the centre of the town—at the much-shelled square. The village of St. Vaast in front of us on the high road was taken by the Taffies, who, however, were unable to proceed, owing to the Division on the right being held up.

The field of our advance lay north-eastward from St. Hilaire, and was part of an encircling manœuvre for the taking of Solesmes. The district is somewhat heavily populated, with the villages approximating to one another, and there

are some half-dozen lines and branch-lines of railway radiating from Solesmes. It was therefore a neighbourhood which served the German capitally for delaying purposes. He was able to make a stubborn resistance, whilst on his far northern flank he evacuated Ostend, Zeebrugge, Bruges, and Lille, Roubaix, Turcoing, and the rest. The retirement marked time ten days, therefore, in the centre, whilst it quick-marched in the north.

Our fellows soon came into touch with hostile power. Two companies were held up on the Friday by machine-guns posted on the first strand of the Solesmes railway. At midnight the other two companies relieved them. The "fighting" company, to which most of the Americans belonged, sent out a patrol to reconnoitre, and I heard afterwards from H—, who had already recovered from his wound and hastened back, how, about a mile along the line, seven of them got cut off and nearly fell into enemy hands. But they rushed the machine-gun post that constituted their chief danger, and got back with the gun and two prisoners.

The enemy, however, slackening as usual to our impetus, was slowly withdrawing, and with that knowledge the two companies were able to cross the railway and "dig in" on the other side. They held the line all night on the Saturday, and on Sunday the 13th were relieved and returned to St. Hilaire.

The great adventure of this stage, however, was the entry into the village of St. Python, in which three platoons participated. Towards midnight on Saturday a railway bridgehead was taken without the enemy knowing it. Another patrol surprised and captured a machine-gun post in silence. Various sentries were disposed of silently, and an entry into the village was effected.

It was found next morning that the sleeping and silent settlement which they had wandered about by night was full of Germans and of French civilians, and our men therefore marched into a mêlée of mingled hostility and hospitality.

A cheery old Highlander, called "Fergie" by us all, one of my original squad, told me how embarrassed he was by the women trying to throw their arms round his neck, whilst he, with fixed bayonet, crept forward, watching every corner of a wall for the shadow of an enemy. The villagers were entranced by our appearance on the scene. It must be said these were the first civilians we had seen for two months. The enemy had been evacuating the French population with his guns and his ammunition, and now, because we had come further than he had expected and had surprised him, we came upon civilians *en masse*. Whether these, during their four years' stay with the enemy, had been ill-treated or not, it would be difficult to say, but they were well-fed and cheerful, and at the same time extremely joyful in greeting us. A captain and a sergeant-major entered one of the houses and

received a very warm greeting, and sat down to have coffee, whilst the women asked question after question about the advance. Wherever our men went indoors and encountered the French, they were regaled with coffee and eggs and soup and what not. But the clearing of the village proceeded all day under heavy machine-gun fire, and much sniping by the enemy. The German commanded nearly all the streets, with his machine-guns posted in the houses on the other side of the river.

The position was such, and remained such, until our relief by the Bill-Browns. We held the half of the village up to the River Selle. The enemy held the half which lies beyond. All bridges were broken, and we were not of sufficient strength to attempt to bridge across the river under fire.

Then Ensign K—— with his platoon endeavoured to reconnoitre the river-bank, with a view to finding some means of crossing. A corporal who went out with him volunteered to go along the bank to examine the timber lying adjacent to a demolished bridge, and see what could be done with it. He at once came into heavy machine-gun fire, but threw himself into the river, and thus saved himself from being killed. The fire ceased, but whenever he put his head up above water it commenced again. Nevertheless, he continued his progress, and achieved his object and returned. His coolness and daring were much admired, and he became the hero of the St. Python incident. His equip-

ment was shot through in several places, and his escaping all wounds partook of the marvellous.¹

The rest of the platoon, sheltering behind a house, had a very hot time. The machine-gun bullets threshed the road and the brickwork, bullets burst right through the house walls, and there were not a few casualties. Of five who attempted to get away to a safer cover only one succeeded without wounds. And as regards the rest, the very slightest chance given was taken by the enemy. Thus "Will," the fine fellow from the Far West, one of my best friends, was peering round the wall in such a way that it would have been said no enemy could see him. But a sniper's bullet passed, nevertheless, through his left tunic pocket, through his cigarette-case and books, and through his heart, and he settled backward with a smile on his lips, but dead. And the survivors, who knew him well, went mad with rage for a moment. Fitz of Virginia, now a corporal, even wanted to lead the rest of the party out to do or die in a big rush on the machines. But the cannier spirits reflected that he was a little bit mad in thinking of such a thing.

A curious feature of the fighting was the way civilians were walking about the streets, some of them wounded and bleeding, but all comparatively unconcerned. One or two of our men were shot by German soldiers disguised as civilians ; one of them, denounced by the rest, was shot in turn by one of our sergeants, for which action the sergeant was much commended by every one.

¹ Afterwards awarded the Victoria Cross.

As time wore on the Germans could be seen quietly and methodically withdrawing from the other half of the village, and moving over to their next standing-ground at Solesmes and on the ridges beyond. When the Bill-Browns took over from us, they had little difficulty in making good the rest of the village. The French civilians were therefore joined once more to France. Many belonged to Boussières, St. Hilaire, and other villages in the rear, and had been marched off when the Germans had evacuated these places. They were now returned under escort to their homes.

Meanwhile the acting quartermaster and eight men were gassed in one and the same cellar in St. Hilaire, and all perished. Amongst the men were two bandsmen, an old soldier who played bass and a very gentle-natured young one who played the tenor-horn. No one put his gas-mask on, and the captain himself, whilst mortally gassed, was going about giving orders, not knowing that every movement he made was stirring the fatal poison into his vitals. He was removed to the hospital at Carnières and died shortly after daybreak, purple through asphyxiation, and foaming at the lips. The gas-shells of the time seem to have been more deadly than usual, though the close atmosphere of the cellar accounts for the terrible fatality in this case. The gas was "green cross," chiefly phosgene, but was thought to be a blend hitherto unused by the enemy. An impressive funeral service took place at Carnières in the twilight of a murky

Saturday evening, when ten of our Spartans were buried side by side in one grave, and the pipes played, and the services were read in succession by Anglican, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic chaplains. The acting quartermaster had been one of our more amusing officers till he died, but the tragic circumstances of his end changed the opinion of all the men about him. All became sorry for him, and for most he became a hero.

So the advance progressed, punctuated by the death of several brave and gallant fellows. The battalion rested at St. Hilaire, which the enemy still shelled fairly steadily, though without causing us loss. The lesson of the late tragedy of gas-shells in cellars was fresh in most minds, and the men were ordered to sleep with their respirators tied at "the alert." For the rest the rumour of peace was in the air ; Germany had accepted the fourteen points of President Wilson, and had agreed to evacuate France and Belgium by military arrangement. Not that due weight was attached to such news. Incredible rumours of the kind and of other kinds were always in the air, and were indulgently received. Germany had accepted the peace conditions, yes, and also Hindenburg was dead ; the Kaiser had committed suicide ; sixteen thousand German soldiers had broken the neutrality of Holland, and the Dutch had declared war. The Americans had taken Metz. With

all that was unlikely, the prospect of peace did not obtain much credence.

The billets of St. Hilaire won every one's approbation. The homes of the exiled villagers were unreservedly in the hands of the soldiers, as were also the strange hoards of potatoes, carrots, and turnips, which the Germans had accumulated in every cellar. The cellars had been dug out marvellously, and contained considerable supplies, which the enemy had been unable to remove in time. Thus every evening there were unusually good suppers simmering on the French stoves, vegetable soups, strengthened by bully, and occasionally by the presence of a rabbit which had been found. On Thursday, October 17, however, the battalion marched back to Boussières, which was crowded with other brother battalions. An atmosphere of festivity and happiness reigned there also, and though rooms were more crowded, the comfort was as unusual as at the former village. And whilst the men sang and gossipped of the war, the chiefs were busy with the details of the next advance. On October 18 a practice moonlight attack was carried out, and on the 19th the battalion marched forward to its new battle positions for the next stage of the advance.

The 19th was a Saturday, and that evening, in a large house on the St. Vaast road, a battalion dinner was given, and all the officers who were going into action after midnight sat down together and dined. The Colonel presided; Captain R—— acted as host, and his cook prepared

the dinner. It was a characteristic occasion, when each, even in conviviality, knew that a few hours hence he or his friend might be dead. At midnight the battalion marched out in the pouring rain to the cross-roads at Arbre de la Femme, and in what was otherwise an almost bloodless advance the youngest of the subalterns met his death.

All that was encountered were rather lonely German posts and slight garrisons in little villages. Prisoners were sent down in the course of the night. The advance was generally notable because of the flaming thermite shells used to indicate the boundaries of the barrage, and also to give the signal when every four minutes the fire-curtain lifted and swept clear of a hundred yards.

It would probably have been more interesting for the units concerned if each could have carried its attack a little further than was planned ; if each attack, instead of being touch and go, could have become a sort of hunting-party. But there were a great many troops available, and when one division had done its little bit, it could stand by and watch others successfully carry the good work further after them. We rested at St. Vaast. In these days the Germans still sought peace, and President Wilson had pointed out the futility of such seeking accompanied by brutal deeds on land and sea. The inhuman practice of deporting the civilian populations of the

villages in the battle area was denounced. The humbled enemy, therefore, changed his policy, and relinquished his grasp upon civilians. The latest villages taken had villagers in the cellars. Liberated peasants and peasants' wives began to appear on the roads, tramping from the German lines. The plight, however, of these soberly clad folk of France was often a fearful one—between two fires—left in ignorance as to whether they were approaching friend or foe. Captain R—— records the sight he witnessed on the sunken road near Haussy. A queue of poor people in black struggled slowly along the road with heavy bundles ; there were children hanging to the women's skirts ; there were old men hobbling on sticks, patiently and slowly returning to the homes whence they had lately been driven. Suddenly, with a long wail through the air, came a German shell, and burst on the road, and following it another and another, menacing the little band. Some were hit by fragments of shell, but they did not flee, only the children clung to their mothers, and the old men tried to hobble a little faster. Captain R—— remarked the marvellous patience of the French women, but he was greatly incensed with the Germans, and like many another at that critical time he felt less than ever disposed to spare the Germans the bitter dregs of utter humiliation and defeat.

Carrying on our offensive, the Second Division was now in the line, and numbers of blue-clad Germans streamed back to us along the highway.

The cages at St. Hilaire filled several times with Germans, strange, unwashed, ill-shaven, dirty men in shoddy uniforms, with broken boots and weather-beaten old hats—all sorts and sizes of men, Prussians, Westphalians, Bavarians, Alsatians, different types of faces, all relieved, all “out of the war,” and yet all depressed. With the failure of Germany’s fortunes in the field the last vestige of dignity seemed to have departed from the faces of the prisoners ; they were creatures that once were men ; human beings who had suffered three successive kinds of degradation—they had been industrialised, then militarised, and finally captured by an enemy. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of curiosity reigned among us regarding them, and we lined the road in numbers to look at them come in, and crowded about the barbed-wire cages to stare at them. After nightfall friendly Tommies brought cigarettes and handed them through the wire, and talked with those who could speak any English. Such conversations were mostly friendly, but I was highly amused to listen one evening while a little fellow in the Royal Scots recapitulated in a loud voice all the atrocities the Germans had committed, and especially those with regard to British prisoners. The captured German kept mildly protesting that it was not true, but the Scot outvoiced him firmly and terribly.

Whilst we were billeted at St. Vaast there was considerable increase in the civilian population. From the villages liberated by the Second

and Third Divisions the évacués of St. Vaast and St. Hilaire came slowly, with their bundles, over the shell-pitted roads, and found their old homes amongst us. They were a very quiet and humble folk, and the children much astonished us by lifting their hats to the officers, even upon occasion to the sergeants—the Prussians had taught them to. The returned villagers took over the living-rooms, and the soldiers went to the barns and the cellars, or they waited for our next remove to take over their property then. Certainly those first to return to their property were luckiest. The Germans during their occupation had moved chairs, beds, tables, clocks, from house to house to suit the requirements of rank and comfort. Each officer had made up his apartment, according to his taste, from the furniture and belongings of neighbouring houses. The consequence was that the returned villagers had to go from house to house with barrows to make up their belongings. Thus, whilst having tea, two women would come in at the door of the billet and look around whilst we saluted them and addressed gallantries. They would select one chair perhaps, or throw loving eyes upon the much-scratched piano. Then our fellows would give them a hand to shift the furniture. Whether in every case these returned villagers had an unbiassed vision of what was their own and what belonged to less fortunate neighbours I cannot say, but I imagine some lively disputes would eventually arise as to whom exactly belonged certain armchairs which had

appeared in an unwonted way in houses that used to be more bare, and whose was the covetable wall-clock that now hung on the wall ?

The joy of returning home must have been not unmixed with grief. Although it was the custom in our battalions always to clean up billets and leave them in a brighter and more habitable condition than that in which we found them, yet some interiors were in indescribable confusion.

The new villagers, however, set to work to clear and to clean, and to render barracks and billets into homes once more. They lived on potatoes and carrots, augmented with army rations ; their fires burned, their wash-tubs outside their houses steamed. For themselves they had a strange unwonted look to us, these first civilians. They were decidedly different from the French we had left behind in the old Arras and Albert regions ; in their faces were reflected the German ; they were more humbled and depressed than the French refugees who had lived with the French. And they did not speak the curious talkee-talkee pigeon-English which our old friends in the background used to converse with us. When we said to them "*Commang ally plank ?*" and "*Tout de suite* and the tooter the sweeter," they seemed mildly surprised. They even brought Germanisms to us, such as the word *kapoot*, unheard by us till then. These apparitions in black seemed like ghosts of people who had died in August 1914. Nevertheless, one felt that Europe was resuming being herself.

Our plans matured for another large onslaught upon the retreating enemy. The line which was within ten miles of Mons in the north halted somewhat at Valenciennes and along the confines of the great forest of Mormal. It was planned for our regiments and for another division to contain the forest, to capture the road-junction of Bavai, and press on for the prize of the fortress of Maubeuge.

Of all the attacks since August 21 this was the largest and the most ambitious. It was entirely successful. It turned out to be the final battle of the war. With our victorious Spartans in the centre and splendid advances on the right flank and on the left, victory in its completest form was granted to the Allies.

So the battalion marched through rain and mud over the old battle-ground of St. Python to Escarmain. At Escarmain, at the cross-roads, the French had put up a stuffed cock on a pole—emblem of victory, and no doubt existed in French minds as to the issue. We were billeted for a day under very crowded conditions at Escarmain.

At dawn on November 4 we set out for the line, passing out of the village with pipers playing. The sun rose over the misty valleys and ridges below, and fresh breezes and clear skies enveloped the first morning of the fight. We made our first halt, and rested below our batteries on the Sepmeries road, most of the men with their fingers in their ears, whilst the gunners, with their sixty-pounders and 8-inch howitzers, kept

giving us the warning to "hold tight." When the march was resumed we began to see the first wounded. We passed a dead German lying with his head in a pool of blood, and then batches of German prisoners carrying stretchers. The wounded of our own comrades began to come down, and told of an easy progress, stopped now and then by isolated machine-gun posts of the enemy.

In the afternoon we marched into Villers Pol, and most men, after sweeping and cleaning the billets, lay down and rested a few hours before the march to the line. Hot suppers and rations were dished out after midnight, and then at 2 A.M., with all the extra fighting impedimenta of shovels and bombs and sand-bags, and what not, the battalion marched cautiously on, scouts reconnoitring each stretch of country in front, and reporting all clear before we crossed it. It was a dark and windy night, and crossing the scenes of the day's fighting, we remarked here and there in the dark the vague shapes of the dead.

The situation on the night of the 4th-5th November was that our 1st and 2nd Brigades had come within 300 yards of their objective, the "Red line" drawn beyond Preux au Sart. The task of our brigade was to pass through the 1st and 2nd Brigades, take the "Red line" position, and press on to Amfroipret near the Belgian frontier, to Bermeries, Buvignies, and the outskirts of Bavai. That done, the 1st Brigade would push on next day following to Maubeuge. Thus,

just before dawn, we reached the position before Preux au Sart, and went into battle formation there. The barrage broke out like a tempestuous drum announcement heralding the dawn, and our men marched on. The "Red line" was passed at twenty to seven, the second objective at ten minutes past eight. Amfroipret was taken in the course of the morning, though the attack was temporarily stayed by machine-gun fire from the village cemetery. The enemy retirement, however, continued, and at nine o'clock the battalion, preceded by tanks, was approaching Bermeries, from which desultory machine-gun and trench-mortar fire was proceeding.

Some difficulty was found in locating the enemy in Bermeries, and progress slowed down till after noon. At 12.30 the village was still held by Germans. Tanks were, however, exploring the position, followed by our advance companies. A further German retirement occurred, and Bermeries proved empty of the enemy. An enemy line was located 400 yards beyond it, in the low scrub alongside an orchard. At 1.30 a sharp encounter took place between one of our companies and a number of German machine-gunner. The enemy was in deep slits, and his positions cleverly hidden. It took about an hour altogether to locate him certainly and dispose of him. Our men made a bayonet charge, and all the Germans were either killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. This was all the active fighting there was for our fellows, though that is not to say it was all the privations they

endured. The men wallowed in mud all night, and it rained and rained, never ceased raining. The German artillery was very active, though firing largely at random. There were a number of casualties from stray shells. The last men to fall in the war fell, as it were, by accident ; strolling back from the line toward Headquarters ; they were being brought back to Bermeries for a few hours' rest, and were lighting cigarettes and chatting in little knots when two heavy shells came in their midst, tore one man's face off, ripped up another's stomach, and the like.

The day after this advance we rested, and the 1st and 2nd Brigades "carried on" and took Maubeuge. In the dead of night the "Bill-Browns," with rifles slung, filed into the town of Maubeuge by the only way left (all bridges being blown up), by stone steps to the moat, which they crossed with the water half up their legs, and then they entered by a stone archway the ancient and formidable fortress. All was silent but for the sound of their feet. And they marched along the empty streets to the grey parade-ground of the Place des Casernes. The Germans had gone ; the French slept. Only in the morning did the civilian population realise that the tyrant had vanished. So Maubeuge came into our hands. Many men who in 1914 had retired through the Maubeuge region at the time of the Retreat from Mons felt a special pride and pleasure in their making good the land from which they had been obliged to retire.

Meanwhile at Versailles the anxious delegates

of ruined Germany were fretting over the armistice terms. We learned that delegates had passed through the lines when we rested a night at La Longueville, coming into Maubeuge. On November 10th all of the division were in or around Maubeuge, and were prepared to go on. It would doubtless have been our battalion's turn to push forward, but the Angel of Peace intervened. On the morning of the 11th came from Headquarters the barely credible intelligence that the Germans had signed the treaty of surrender, and that from 11 A.M. hostilities would cease. Thus the impossible intervened, and as by miracle wrote *finis* across the four and a quarter years of bloodshed and strife which we are accustomed to call the Great War.

XIV

THE MARCH TO THE RHINE

WE had dwelt too long in darkness to accustom ourselves readily to the new light of peace, and when on the morning of November 11, 1918, the strange announcement of Armistice was made, we merely felt confused and incredulous. It was such a common event in the army for the desired thing to be invented in rumour that the authentic and official news of complete victory was merely accepted in the same category as "The Kaiser has taken poison," and the rest of the optimistic tales of the hour. I was first to get the news, for the brigade runner came with the message, and could not find to whom to deliver it. Guessing what it was, I opened his missive and read —*An armistice has been signed with the Central Powers a a a. Hostilities will cease as from 11 o'clock this morning a a a.* Directly he had gone I took the news to my comrades. Some believed, some did not. Most asked me what it meant, but some with imagination caught my right hand in both theirs, and expressed themselves as bursting with joy. Half an hour later most of the battalion was drilling, and the

officers calmly and politely told the men the war had ended. Then men began to go about like owls disturbed at mid-day, and kept saying to one another without any particular excitement, "What do you think of it, eh?"

The first thought of those who understood and believed was, "No more bombs, no more shells, no more bullets; we are safe, then, after all, we shall get back to our homes, to our wives, to mother and father, and all we love in Blighty." The immeasurable relief of escape from the daily menace of death! The pulse of some, even of the bravest, beat more freely. They were spared. Their wives, mothers, children, and friends were reprieved. For dying was not the hardest thing; the hardest thing was plunging one's home in sorrow.

Two days after the signing of the Armistice there was a men's concert in one of the many French steel works. There was a platform on which were ranged our instrumental band and pipers. In a vast shadowy hall the troops were accommodated. Quartermaster-sergeants were dishing out rum punch, which the officers had afforded us. A new good humour had come into men's voices. The verity of victory had suffused the surface of all minds. The soldiers sang in chorus to the band, they sang even to the pipes. Singers had an unprecedented reception, and when as answer to encore the band struck up "Take me back to Blighty," the whole vast audience of Tommies seemed to melt and fuse in its enthusiasm. The theme of going back home

touched their hearts as never before. For now suddenly, after years of hope and hopelessness, it had become a practical matter.

The day after the concert there was a lecture by a Divisional Staff officer on Demobilisation, on that first scheme of slip-men and pivots and one-man-business-men which proved so slow and worked so ill. Said the officer, "I know perhaps you won't agree, but I'd like to say to you men that you might do worse than think of going into the army as a means of living after the war. Conditions of service will be much improved." Whereupon there was a roar of laughter throughout the whole audience, and we felt somehow that was the best joke of the whole Armistice time.

The Demobilisation scheme dashed the hopes of some of the forward men who thought of being home in a few weeks, but it nevertheless contributed to confirm the impression in backward minds that the war was really over. We remained a week at Maubeuge and ruminated on the new time. The mysterious silence of no shells had set in, and when it was broken by the distant rumble of an exploded German mine or ammunition-dump the men wondered nervously if the war had not broken out again. Returning French prisoners appeared on the road, and also civilians with their household goods. At night, even on the night of the 11th of November, motor-cars had come up with great headlights and windows began to be left unshuttered and unscreened again. The nights of waiting at Maubeuge were still and cloudless. And one

realised the night once more was pure. The trouble that had obscured her innocence was gone. There was no longer any sinister doubt when the moon

Unveiled her peerless light and o'er the dark
Her silver mantle threw

An assurance of peace calmed the heart, and it was good to walk at night and reflect on what had been and what would be no more.

Two days before setting out we marched to the barrack square in Maubeuge to a General Thanksgiving, and as was very fit, our voices joined in

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come.

In the secular mind, however, the question of the future was uppermost, and a new crop of rumours arrived, the most widespread being that we were going to Paris to be reviewed by Joffre and were then going to London. But the simple fact was that we were detailed for garrison duty in Germany, and must first fulfil a long march—through Belgium and Rhineland to the banks of the great mother river of Europe, the Rhine. The battalion commenced to do practice route-marches. The men had to wash their equipment and shine up brasses and clean boots in their old training-barracks style. Discipline became more severe, and we understood that we had got to dazzle the Belgians and impress the Germans by our smartness and by the austerity of our fulfilment of duty.

The first week after the Armistice therefore

was one of ardent preparations to shine. New clothing was brought up and the old discarded. All kits were revised, and if any man was short of anything which he could not make up from the supplies he was warned to pick it up somewhere, and if any one of any other unit left the desirable thing about, "looking spare," he had better "see it off."

Whilst the battalion had to "dump" a great quantity of impedimenta, such as for instance, its dulcetone piano, boxes of books, and bits of furniture, it had also to make up deficiencies. Bicycles were short, and they were needed as an absolute necessity for the billeting parties who went ahead each morning to take billets for the rest of us. We had been originally supplied with eight bicycles. We now only had three, and the number had somehow to be made up.

The adjutant was anxious, and I remember his coming into the orderly room on the night of the 16th of November.

"I hope something's being done about these bicycles," says he.

"It's all right, sir," says a drill-sergeant. "We've got the four best robbers in the battalion out to-night, and I shall be surprised if the numbers are not all right by morning."

"You have? . . . Right Oh!" says the adjutant, and he goes away.

Presently one of the "robbers" comes in with a bicycle, and is hailed with joy. The bicycle is placed up against a wall. It belongs to a despatch-rider. He has jumped from his seat and

gone into a house to deliver a message ; directly he had got inside the house the "robber" had seized the machine.

However, the owner being a sharp boy sees the back wheel of the bicycle disappearing at our door. He runs across the road and comes in also.

"'Ere, wot's the gime ?" says he. "Who's pinched my bike ?"

The drill-sergeant then pounces upon him.

"Don't you know how to come in to an orderly room ?" asks he in his harshest regimental style. "What do you mean by it ? Stand to attention when you are being spoken to. How should there be a bicycle of yours in here ?"

The despatch-rider is cowed, apologises, and thinks perhaps he has made a mistake.

When he has gone the bicycle is wheeled out at a back door for safety. But the original owner, still suspicious, is watching through the window and therefore sees this operation, goes round to the back and meets the man with the bicycle in the yard, claims it, and rides off.

I expect he cursed us, but did not think very much of the matter. For it's a way they have in the army.

During the march my name was taken one day for the deficiency of an entrenching-tool handle. There were some others in the same case, and we were marched before a charming young officer who had only been a few months with us, but had nevertheless absorbed the army way.

"Now look here, you fellows," says he. "It's a lot of bally rot your not having entrenching-tools. You know jolly well you dumped them some time or other. But you've got to have them, and there's lots of Taffies and Bill-Browns about. See each of you has one by to-morrow morning or there'll be trouble."

"I want the battalion to be the very best upon the road," said the colonel, and every one of us was intent that it should be so.

It was bright, frosty weather, and the battalion in a new glitter of peace looked very well on the march. It was not too unpleasant an ordeal for the men, though some were ready to criticise when they saw they had still to carry gas-masks and steel-helmets and a hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition as well as heavy packs and well-oiled rifles and equipment with every brass a-glitter. But most of the sensible ones understood that it would be best to enter Germany in full fighting trim, and with all the reinforcement of moral influence which training and discipline and style could afford.

The load to be carried was heavy, and so a medical inspection was ordered, and men likely to fall out on the march were separated off and kept behind. Bad characters who might be expected to run amuck in Germany were also ordered to be held back, but I do not think our colonel found any bad enough for that. General Rawlinson's manifesto was served out to each of us, and we read that whereas Prussian discipline was founded on fear ours was founded on mutual

trust between officers and men, and we wondered if that was so, but we did not wonder much. A cartload of new boots was brought up for the torment of our feet should our soles give way ; all the last preparations were made for departure, and on the morning of the 18th November we set out from Maubeuge.

It was misty and frosty, and it threatened to snow as we marched out in our long files, keeping studiously to our right on the way to the last village of France, Villers Sire Nicolet. The road was hard after several days' frost. We were all provided with gloves, which kept our fingers from being chilled, and the march was pleasant. We must have afforded a strange contrast, all rosy-cheeked, well-equipped, well-set-up, marching with decision and style, we and the returning British army of prisoners we met on the road, the haggard-faced soldiers, worn-out and emaciated, who in fives and sixes came straggling in from Namur and Charleroi where they had been liberated in accordance with the Armistice conditions. They were dressed in parts of old German uniforms. Some had black trousers with broad white stripes, some were wearing shabby Prussian blue, nearly all had German caps decorated with little Union Jacks and French and Belgian colours. They carried bits of equipment, such as gas-masks or haversacks ; their boots were worn out ; on their chests large numbers were printed, in convict style. And they walked slowly and lamely, being absolutely worn out, their arms and legs wasted away, their eyes

sunken and with flabby folds of flesh hanging beneath them. No recruiting officer, even at the hardest time of the war, would have enrolled such specimens of humanity in an army. Yet they had all been stalwart fellows when they fell into German hands. Doubtless their condition and appearance would be much improved by the time they got to England—thanks to the care of French and English in the rear—but for us who saw them as delivered from captivity the sight is unforgettable.

The French prisoners seemed to be in much better case, and they had evidently been treated with more consideration by the enemy. But after the returning British soldiers the most pitiable picture was presented by the returning civilians who, with improvised barrows but no horses, oxen, or mules, were wheeling the indispensables of home from one territory to another. Many of these civilians came from remote places and had chalked on the barrow-sides the names of the towns they had passed through. Large flags flew from the front corners of the barrows giving them a very picturesque appearance. Young men walked in the shafts, old men and women pushed behind, children lay on confused heaps of mattresses and furniture above. When questioned we found these people made such great distances as fifty or sixty kilometres in a day. They were pitiable, but were in wonderful spirits, being free and going home, and they frequently gave us a hearty greeting, and bade us make an end of the German.

Such passers-by formed the main interest of the day's march, and in the afternoon we came to our first halting-place, an extensive but desolate old-fashioned village called Villers Sire Nicolet, and in the rainy evening we went into rather dark and cold billets, redeemed here and there by the bright fires of the hospitable French.

Before dawn on the morning of the 19th the pipers were playing "Hey, Johnny Cope." It had rained all night, and the morning was dark. We paraded in the gloom of a wet dawn, and with our somewhat heavy impedimenta stamped out toward Belgium along the heavy and broken roads. Possibly the few miles of borderland were nobody's care, and so the roads were not in repair. That was the impression we obtained. And the people in the infrequent farmhouses seemed all poverty-stricken. However, we climbed on and crossed the frontier line near Givry. Here a queue of poor villagers turned out to stare at us, the women bundles of cotton, the men in capacious muddy sabots and the baggiest of old clothes. Not a word from them, not a smile.

At this point, coming as we did from the suffering regions of the north of France, we did not expect much excitement on the part of the villagers, and so we accepted the silence of the first poor Belgians and were somewhat surprised at the flags and bunting displayed at the next point on our road, Estinne au Mont. Now rather better-looking crowds turned out to see us and chattered volubly about us. "They'll be cheering in a minute," somebody exclaimed

incredulously, and surely enough there broke out a will-o'-the-wisp of a hurrah and a "Vive les Anglais!" from several lips. From there onwards our reception grew warmer and warmer until our progress took its foredestined guise of a triumphal procession. We passed under floral arches and strings of bunting, and alongside streams of smiling men and women who greeted us more and more happily and readily as we approached the large town of Binche. We realised then we were inside Belgium and were going to be fêted by the people. So our packs, which had been heavy enough in the morning in the mud of the frontier, grew lighter in the warmth and excitement of noon amid a cheering populace.

In the afternoon we were conducted to billets in the best places in Binche, and every one seemed pleased to see us. In windows everywhere were paper posters which had possibly been printed by some propaganda department of the Allied Governments, and these conspired with the more realistic greetings in French to produce many tongues of welcome. Thus we read :

WE WILL NEVER FORGET YOU

and

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE HEROES OF
PERONNE AND BAPAUME

and

HONNEUR À NOS LIBERATEURS

and

ENGLAND IS SATISFIED: YOU HAVE DONE
YOUR DUTY.

The last notice, which was very widespread, troubled our minds a little. Perhaps it accounted for one corporal saying to a sergeant who found fault with him : “ I have completed my contract. I am not a soldier any longer, but a civilian,” a remark on which the colonel made many judicious comments with regard to the continuance of discipline.

However, the cheery faces of the townsfolk and the breezy welcome of posters and banners, the brazen trumpetings of the civic band, the Lord Mayor’s show in which our Major-General marched to the plaudits of the crowd, probably moved us less than the rumour of beer, of which commodity we soon found the estaminets to be full at a not exceptional price—and good beer of the old pre-war standard. The sight of rows of shop-windows was gladdening in itself after the desolation we had passed through, and we went into these expensive shops of Binche and spent for the sake of spending. There was a fair amount for sale. One could buy a Bath bun for three francs, and a penny bar of chocolate for one franc seventy-five centimes. Soap, in need of which we stood at the time, was four francs the tablet, blacking a franc a tin, bootlaces two francs a pair. Then the shopkeepers, although their wares were priced in francs, had only German currency, and they still reckoned one mark as one franc twenty-five centimes, though it must have been doubtful if the mark was worth much more than half-a-franc. There were some warm disputes over change, but they generally finished

with our men accepting marks and pfennigs. Our pockets were soon full of the black war money of our enemies and the wretched zinc coinage of Belgium. Not a few astute towns-men began exchanging money for our men, telling them their francs were now no good and it was better to have marks.

At Binche we nibbled at the joys of liberated Belgium. It was left for next day to taste them to the full when we reached the neighbourhood of Charleroi and were welcomed by the hearty population of Marchiennes au Pont.

On the 20th we marched off at nine in the morning with the abundant *rub-dub-dub* of the drums and the joyful clamour of the pipes and took the high-road that runs due east for Fontaine l'Eveque and Charleroi. We were all in a good humour, and when the music of the pipes died down we carried on with whistling choruses and songs whilst the thickly populated region through which we passed was decked with signs of welcome. We were on good roads, and our hearts were lighter, realising that the first part of our march was in any case not so much duty as festivity. Joyful crowds of liberated people saluted us, and we shouted back to them as we passed. About two in the afternoon we reached Marchiennes.

We put down the heavy packs from our shoulders and laid aside our rifles, cleaned our boots after the long march, and still a little lame in

the feet and racked in our backs, stepped nevertheless eagerly forth into the gay Belgian town hung with bunting and flags and flocking with a joyful excited populace of civilians. We were in that mood when the apparition of the first electric tram gliding into view gladdened the eyes, when the smell of locomotive smoke and steam across the grimy railway lines reminded of home, when the sight of young men in numbers in civilian attire made the heart beat faster with anticipative joy at our own coming release. The town was posted with joyful greetings : “*Honneur à nos libérateurs !*” “*Honneur aux Heros !*” “*Madame la Guerre est morte.*” And on blue paper in many windows was printed “*Welcome Tommy ! We never doubted you would come again.*”

The eyes of men and women looked gladly at us ; there was a tenderness in the gaze which was a little puzzling after the sternness and desolation of battlefields. The people were really glad. The heart had been touched, and in all faces there was that trembling on the waters as at dawn, the emotion of human tenderness suddenly awakened not in one but in all. The women and the children caught our hands as we passed, and lisped up at us, “*La guerre est finie,*” or “*Après quatre années, après quatre années !*” as if to suggest their relief, their infinite relief, at the flight of the enemy and the entry of our army of liberation.

On the Friday the last German battalion without horses but with men in the shafts of the

waggons passed through the town. On the following Wednesday the first British infantry arrived. The English soldier was a novelty, a hero and a saviour at the same time. There was hidden virtue in khaki, and even to touch the common soldier was good. There was magnetic contact between us and the crowd. The girls smiled on us, men shook hands with us promiscuously, and children reached up to be kissed. Great numbers of little children were in the street, some with their mothers, some without, and all were radiantly innocent and welcoming. It was common to see five or six little ones hanging on to the sleeves of one of our stalwart fellows, much to his pleasure though also to his astonishment. We had not been treated in this way before.

At three in the afternoon two of us entered a smart café where stout Belgians in frock-coats and silk hats were standing free drinks of cognac at two marks the *petit verre*. Other fellows in another part of the town found a brewery where beer was free, good beer served out as fast as arms of buxom maids could serve it. It was one of the rare occasions in the life of the soldier when one of his ideals is realised.

“ The brewery gates stand open and they are giving away beer.”

“ Never ! ”

We spoke with the benign and somewhat grand Belgians who were treating the Tommies to cognac and paying for it from sheaves of spotless German notes. “ Every one in Mar-

chiennes seems excited," said I. "It's a wonderful welcome."

"But there's more to come," replied they, fingering the civic medallions on their watch-chains. "At six o'clock there will be a *procession de flambeaux*."

"Yes, and a band of a hundred and fifty instruments. There will be a *fête*. We shall all dance in the streets."

Six was some time after nightfall, but the town was lit up from end to end. The crowd of civilians and soldiers thronged the roads. For my part I stood and waited in the town square for the emergence of the band and the procession, and was curious. Several comrades were within hail. All felt a little tired and stiff after the march. They did not dream they were going to dance for hours that night without a sigh of tiredness or a twinge of stiffness.

Out came the band at a jaunty stride, and every bandsman wore a silk hat, out came the town banners, and then strings of coloured lanterns of paper with glimmering lights inside—and then the murmurs of the crowd and a swaying toward the poles on which the lanterns hung. Old folk were in the crowd and young, gay girls and cheerful matrons, and there were our soldiers, and, besides all, an inordinate number of clinging laughing children.

I was suddenly grasped by two middle-aged Belgians of a prosperous commercial type; each took one of my arms, others took their other arms, and with a palm on each neighbour's back we

started to dance after the band, shoulders down, head up, knees and toes kicking out in a *pas de joie*. I had not been in an orgy before, but good-humouredly fell in. We plunged after the band, singing the "Marseillaise," the "Brabançonne," and what not as we went.

I broke, however, with my sedate companions, got to one side and began to watch the tumultuous joy-crowd go past. Here my real adventure commenced. I saw a poor woman beside a lamp-post trying to comfort a little child that was crying, and stooping down to give my aid the youngster grasped my hand. Another standing by took my other hand, and in less than a minute I had rejoined the dance with six wee children. We danced with a will all along the fringe of the throng between the main body and the shop-windows, and gradually worked our way from the back to the front of the procession and the immediate vicinity of the wonderful lanterns and the triumphant blare of the quick-stepping band. Thus we traversed the whole town twice, and then when the band stopped in the town square we joined hands in a circle as did so many other strings of folk, and danced there. And the children had words for every song, street words generally, the favourite being a parody of some song to which the German soldiers had marched :

Margarita, si tu veux
Faire mon bonheur,
Casse la gueule
A l'empereur,

and every time a tune was ended all broke off and threw up their hands and cheered.

We went to a sweet-shop and bought packets of peppermints, and then to a pastry-cook's and bought big slices of gingerbread for all and each. The pastry-cook gave me a cup of coffee, for which she said I might pay after peace had been signed. Then we walked slowly through the streets munching cake—much to the amazement of soldiers and civilians alike.

We joined in the dance again, and the children never seemed tired. They were Madeleine, Marie, Marie, René, Albert (*le roi*), Marguerite, and the eldest was only nine. Their enjoyment of the *fête* was pure and complete. It possessed the whole of their little bodies. Round and round we went in a circle till we were dizzy, and back and forth, approaching and retiring, whilst all about us was the whirl of other circles mostly of British soldiers and Belgian girls but often of sedate matrons and the fathers of the community. We had some collisions but no casualties, for the children held hands so tightly that they never got knocked down. At one point little Marguerite, so low down and far from my face, kissed my fingers as she danced ; at another point all these little ones were down on their knees saying their prayers in chorus. Onlookers cried out in pauses of the dance “ *A bas les Boches !* ” and we replied, “ *A bas les sales Boches !* ” or rubbish of the same kind, without, however, meaning anything sinister. Ours was a dance of pure joy, an infection of the time. For us the Pied

Piper was playing, and we had left the bourgeois fathers and mothers behind. What a wonderful happiness was that of the children who followed the piper, for I believe they always remained children and danced to the music whilst the rest of the world sat with scored brows and calculated and judged.

“I see that in Rome you believe in doing as Rome does,” said a fellow-soldier to me in barracks afterwards.

“You were well away,” said another.

“You were drunk all right last night, my boy,” said a third.

If so, not drunk with the portly Belgians’ cognac or the beer, but drunk with joy, with the spirit of peace. The vast human emotion that had sent mad London, Paris, Brussels, New York, had come to us at last, and we were swimming amidst its waves.

And the children? They understood in their little hearts what was in the air. Marchiennes was theirs. It was a children’s festival.

At last we parted. The mother who somehow had been struggling after us through the crowds and keeping us in view claimed little Madeleine, and then each one kissed me goodbye and claimed me for that morrow that never comes, and I marched off, just in time to enter barracks by tattoo. And I washed and changed and lay down to sleep and did not feel tired in any limb. The wonderful refreshment of happiness!

The progress into the obscurer parts of Belgium was like rediscovering a lost place, unearthing again a countryside after a great landslide. We had lost sight of the main part of Belgium in 1914, and we only recovered sight of it in these last weeks of the armistice year. It was a curious impression. Belgium had not gone on after the German eruption. But her life had paused where it was and the hours remained where they were. All that the people knew of the bloodshed and fire of the strife related to the days of August 1914; the battles of the later times did not have for them the substantial reality they had for us. We could not talk to them of the Battle of the Somme or the German spring offensive of 1918, but had perforce to dig up the half-forgotten facts of the first month of the war and talk of them.

We marched away into the Ardennes and were billeted in such obscure places as Bambois in the commune of St. Gerard, Wierde, Faulx, Tharout, Bende, Ernonheid, Zhevigny, Petit Thier, villages or hamlets far from the centres of life, far even in little Belgium where one would have thought no place could be far.

“One night as I lay abed I heard a strange sound,” said a Walloon farm-wife in her antique patois, “as if many horses were neighing in the fields in the distance. It was so disturbing that I awakened my husband.” He went to find out what it could be, and he learned from neighbours that it was the Germans who had arrived. They came on horseback and not by the road, but

streamed across the fields and through the woods in an endless array. All the sleepy hollows were invaded with brand-new warriors.

In some places one met old folk who, besides their impressions of this war, remembered listening to the cannonade in the Franco-German strife of 1870 : they told me how they bent down to earth, listened and just heard it. And they listened and heard the bombardment in this war also. How staggering was August 1914 to these quiet people ! The women wept, the men were nonplussed, the Prussians swaggered and bullied. The natives were so dumbfounded that they evidently amused the German soldiers, and the latter made sport of them, tying old folk together, back to back, and making them dance ; tying priests to the altars of their churches, ducking old women in wells, firing barns, shooting almost at random and at sight. We listened to hundreds of tales of the behaviour of the enemy coming in and of the brutal things he did, and then again we listened to the story of the way he went out of the country in November 1918, humbled, dejected, with eyes which could look no one in the face.

Most of the villages had their graves of German dead—one here, another there, and sometimes one would discover (where opposition had been met) large collections of graves and military cemeteries. There was a large enclosure of stone graves at St. Gerard—a sad memorial of the grand style of death and war in the braver days of that tragical first August.

There had been resistance at St. Gerard on the part of the rearguard of the Belgian Army reinforced by French. About five hundred friends and foes had perished, and the Germans, with a touch of that sense of honour and valour which distinguished them until the gospel of necessity ate into their morals, gave to each and all an equal place in the memorial of their death. Thus at the head of the graveyard, instead of the suffering Jesus on the high cross that marks the cemeteries of the French, they had erected an obelisk of granite thirty feet high and eight feet in thickness, and on the height of this massive column was printed in Latin :

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori;

and under that in German :

ZUM GEDACHTNIS
AN DIE KAMPFE BEI
ST. GERARD
IN DEN ANGEHORIGEN
DER DEUTSCHEN GARDE
FRANZÖSISCHE UND
BELGISCHE KRIEGER
AM 23-24 AUGUST 1914
DEN HELDENTOD FÜR
IHR VATERLAND STARBEN ;

and under that again was written in French :

A LA MÉMOIRE
DES BRAVES SOLDATS
ALLEMANDS BELGES ET FRANÇAIS
TOMBÉS
POUR LEUR PATRIE
DANS LES COMBATS DE
ST. GÉRARD
LE 23-24 AOÛT 1914 ;

and under that again, on the ground, lay three huge, heavy, withered wreaths.

Facing this obelisk were rectangles of perfect lawn, smooth black cinder-paths, and ten massive slabs of granite placed at intervals along the outer edges of the lawns for seats from which to look at the graves. The latter were ranged along four borders in a perfectly symmetrical design. The crosses were all of the same grey granite, smaller than graveyard crosses usually are—as if shorn of individuality—and all were the same in size and appearance. French were together, Belgians together, Germans together. All was perfectly disciplined, and as the design ran to 500 graves, whereas there were only 497 dead, three dummy stones had been put in that there might be no blank files amid the crosses. The rigid obedience of Prussia reigned also amid the dead.

I walked from cross to cross and read the names, lingering longer where instead of names was written all that could be said of poor, maimed, indistinguishable bodies :

Un français.
Un soldat.
Un artilleur français.
Un tirailleur algerien.
Ein deutscher soldat.
Deutsch Pierre.
Hervé Desire.
Petit Maurice.
Pochet Louis d'Arras.

There were many such, which spoke of a battle that must have been terrible in its way. I

thought of the fate of the men to die so soon in the adventure, to be cut off *then*, such a wan fate, but better perhaps than to go through it all, through all the fields of blood, and perish at the last. There was one grave that broke up the symmetry and the discipline of this graveyard, one crooked cross of new unpainted wood in the midst of the grey stone. On it was written in German : "Here lies in God, Heinrich Widding, who died on the 11th November 1918."

He died on the day of the Armistice, the day which marked the failure of the great discipline of Prussia, and a weak ordinary wooden cross marked the progress of humanity on this background of grey stone.

Not far from this scene were miles and miles of new-set wire before the trenches of Namur and the line of its mighty stream. And as we marched we thought how men might have died again in these fields and how by God's mercy men were spared. We crossed the majestic even-flowing Meuse on German pontoons beside the great heights of Wepion and Dave, and were ever on the trace of the insubordinate hurrying and retiring army. By many a German helmet and abandoned rifle, by many a broken-down, dismantled lorry or gun, we slogged on in mud and rain, noticing all the signs, but saying little to our neighbours as our feet pulsed to the drum-beat of the march and our hearts lifted to the strains of our questing and exploring pipers. Always the peasants said : The Germans passed through so many days before ; they marched

with their officers under arrest ; they marched silently, no songs, no more shouting of *Nach Paris* as of old. We began to see in nearly every village, and often along the road, effigies, of the enemy set up by the inventive Belgians, regular Guy Fawkes figures, German soldiers' tunics and breeches stuffed with straw, a bunch of rags for a head, a casserole on that, and a gas-mask dangling from where the ears should be. Below all an ironical inscription : “ *Nach Paris* ” or “ *Kapoot.* ”

“ How did he pass ? Was he humble ? ” we asked often concerning the enemy.

“ When he came he was too grand for words, but when he returned he was *petit, petit*, ” said the Belgians, laughing gleefully.

The same Belgians were not all so happy if one mentioned the subject of cows to them. “ He drove away all our cows. The procession of his cows was much longer than the procession of his men. Whenever they want meat they kill another cow. ”

We passed often the pitiful remains of but lately slaughtered cows—heads of cows with faces fresh and pleading, entrails of cows in horrible grey heaps, all along the way. And then all billets, all fields where the enemy had camped, were left in indescribable filth. There were the evidences of a complete breakdown of discipline.

The country people showed us the black debris of great bonfires where the retreating soldiers had piled rifles and machine-guns and stores of all kinds, and set fire to them before crossing the

frontier to Germany. Over most of these bonfires sentries were placed, and the Germans were sufficiently German to shoot down any Belgian who attempted to steal from these funeral pyres of the war.

At Bende a farmer told how a German officer received the news of the armistice. He was sitting at the table with a bottle of cognac and a German novel. A corporal came in with the communiqué, read it out, and handed it to the officer. The latter, reading it, gave a deep groan, rose from his chair and threw his helmet with a crash upon the stone floor. Then he took a terrible draught at the cognac, omitting to pour it into a glass, but putting the whole bottle to his lips. He picked up his helmet and was quiet for a while, buried in thought. Then suddenly once more he started up, groaned again, flung down his hat and ran his fingers through his hair in an agony of grief.

Later in the evening some of his men came and turned him out of his bedroom at the farmhouse and said, "Up till now you have slept in a bed and we in lousy straw. Now it is your turn to sleep in the straw." And so it was.

Our way was rather uncertain, we had no fore-ordained plan of progress, but waited each night for the name of the village of the morrow. Rumour would have sent us a score of ways: to Paris to welcome King George at the Arc de Triomphe, to Brussels to be inspected by King

Albert, to London, to Edinburgh, to Bonn, to Coblenz ; it sent us by train and it sent us by lorry ; it told us we should neither go to Germany nor return home, but be held on "lines of communication." We approached Namur, but did not enter it ; set off for Liège, but were turned away from it ; were going to enter Germany by Aix-la-Chapelle and then by Stavelot and then by Beho. Nearing Huy we turned south-eastward, and crossing the Ourthe at Hamoir plunged into the Belgian Ardennes and came near to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

In all these wanderings the pipers were our companions, leading us and exploring the way. Two days, indeed, our instrumental band shared the honours with the pipers and we took our step to the solemn chanting march of "Sambre et Meuse," but the General intervened. We must not march to instrumental music and this band must cease. So before and after this instrumental blare of brass it was the slogan alone that we followed.

The various companies of the battalion took it in turn to be first in the march, to be second, to be third, to follow up the rear, and when the company was in front it heard the music in all its immediacy and splendour, but when it was behind it only heard it far away like a child's voice sobbing or calling now and then. Passing over the crest of a hill the music rose with the height and then became silent as the vanguard dipped into the hollow beyond, rising however again from the basin of the valley and resounding back

in increasing volume and happiness. When the road turned half-right skirting a hill the whole rearguard was enlivened by the pipes coming as it were toward them. When the road lay even over marshes and plains the music was deadened, but when we entered forests it sprang to life as if the woodland were full of pipers—a clamorous, exulting, echoing music, that of the woods! And in the gorges and ravines Nature responded also from the rocks.

Wonderful pipes! The men are inclined to grumble and fall out, but the pipes make a unity of them. Invisible tendons and muscles seem to connect the legs of all files, and all move as one, mechanically, rhythmically, certainly. The strong are reduced to the step, the weak are braced up to it. All bear the strain and share the strain. So we go on, and the miracle is in the power of the music.

The first weeks of our journeying were punctuated by long halts, but the last ten days in the wettest of the weather were continuous marches. They made the most trying time of our experience. Boots wore out. Clothes got wet through and could not be dried. Rations were often delayed, and from continuous wearing of our heavy packs our shoulders were galled. But the curiosity to see Germany, the sense of an adventure, and the music kept our spirits up. At each new turn of the road the evenly pacing Highlanders in the vanguard of our column felt the way, explored the new way, playing as they went.

Thus on the morning of the 12th December,

parading in the wet before dawn, all in our waterproof capes, we left the last forlorn village of the Belgian Ardennes and climbed out to the mysterious line which we all wished to see, that put friendly land behind and left only enemy country in front. One asked oneself what Germany would be like. But only an hour was needed to bring us to the custom-houses and the sentry-posts. We marched to attention, the rain streamed off our capes and trickled from our hats, but the tireless pipers played ahead, and by some one's inspiration the word went to the pipe-major, play "Over the Border"; so with a skirl that no weather could suppress we came up to the line to the strains of

March, march, all in good order,
All the blue bonnets are over the Border.

Then the pipers separated from the main body and took up their stand in a phalanx by the side of the road beside the familiar figure of our Brigadier, and they played "Hieland Laddie" whilst we marched past at the salute. Thus we entered Germany with no formalities and no enemy in view. We felt much cheered though the time was cheerless, and we were full of curiosity to see the people we still called Huns, and men still talked of bayoneting and cutting throats. Presently we began to pass cottages, and we stared at them, but could see no people. Some of us shouted, "Come out and show yourselves" and "Come out of hiding," forgetting that "Jerry," as we called him, was hardly likely to be properly awake yet.

When we began to see Germans they paid no attention to us whatever, but the woman at the well went on drawing water and the man with straw in his arms continued his way to his barn without vouchsafing a glance. We saw women talking with their backs to us, and they did not turn round to look at us as we passed. The children were as nonchalant towards the gay figures of our kilties as if they saw pipers every day of the week. It must be said we were a little taken aback, a little mortified. But it rained and rained and the drums became silent, sodden and soaked with the water, and we splashed patiently and mechanically on through the mud and over the broken roads. Our fours became twos, became long threads of single file as we picked our way amidst great holes and ruts and gliding rivers of yellow ooze. When there would otherwise have been a view of Germany, trailing mist, liquefying in the wind to bitter rain, swept hither and thither across our faces. On the sides of the roads was desolation, and occasionally still, as in Belgium, the sinister grey heaps of the entrails of cows which told of the indisciplined German Army which had retired before us.

And with every one wet to the bone we climbed the excruciatingly broken road over the hill from Amel to Möderscheide. In this wretched German village we were billeted, and the men made huge bonfires in the barnyards, and stood round them to dry themselves. The Germans seemed to be rather afraid of us, and

servile, but very poor. Tottering old men insisted on shaking hands with us. The girls of the place seemed to be carefully kept out of our way. Billets were wretched, and the men, still fire-eating, hunted for better ones which, when they found, they intended to take by storm. Those who had revolvers expected to have to use them. But we only discovered that the native inhabitants slept in worse places than we had, and that every one was of the mildest disposition. Our blankets and reserve rations were in the waggons stuck at the bottom of the Amel hill. There was only one thing to do—to get dry and make the best of it.

Next day, with the skies still streaming, we made the longest continuous march, some thirty-six kilometres, and by that effort got well into Germany. The roads improved as we got further on, but the tramp through the forest of Zitter was long, marshy, and melancholy. Our company was first after the pipers, and had the full benefit of the music all the way. And we wandered inward, inward, with our seeking and haunting Gaelic melodies, into the depths of the hanging silent wood. It was strange how aloof Nature seemed to these melodies. In Scotland, or even in France, all the hills and the woods would have helped the music. But in this German land all were cold toward us, and those endless pine-trees seemed to be holding hands with fingers spread before the eyes to show their shame and humiliation. There was a curious sense that the road on which we trod was not

our road, and that earth and her fruits on either hand were hostile.

And how tired the men became, with half of them through the soles of their boots and with racking damp in their shoulders and backs from their rain-sodden packs ! But we listened still, whilst voluminous waves of melody wandered homeless over German wastes and returned to us :

I heard the pibroch sounding, sounding,
O'er the wide meadows and lands from afar,

or to the stirring strains of the “ March of the Battle of Harlaw,” or to the crooning, hoping, sobbing of “ Lord Lovat’s Lament,” and so went on from hour to hour through the emptiness of southern Germany. I thought of the wonderful theme which this march offered to the musician, and knew in anticipation that some day the world would possess some great musical composition on the March to the Rhine—an “ 1812 ” for Western Europe which some Tchaikovsky would compose. I thought of its nature. Would it not begin with the blare of brass obscuring the tremulous hopes and fears of March 21, 1918 ; it would be noisy and ambitious and terrifying and vulgar. But this vulgarity would fail, met by the will of Britain, France, America, Italy, Serbia, the will of the rest of humanity. The fears would gain ground till the point of surrender arrived. Then would commence the music of our strange march. No, not one in which “ Deutschland über Alles ” faded into “ Rule Britannia ” and the “ Marseillaise,” not one of

exultancy of victor and utter rout of fleeing foe. But it would be sad, penetrating music, questing music, haunting music, all subdued and, as it were, prostrated. The voices of the German dead would rise into it, not exultantly, nor menacingly, but in curious sadness, as if they were unreconciled with their own sacrifice ; the German land and the German forests would speak their shame in it, the German gods would grow small and abase themselves, and all that the proud Wagner ever conceived would die away to a piping of birds in one note over wildernesses. The fall of Germany was a greater event than the victory of those who strove against her.

The pipes seemed to express the thought, the Gaelic wailing in the rain and the steady march through the ancient woods.

Still we swung along the way to the Rhine, and knew our halt could not be far. However, when we thought we had just about reached our camping-ground for the night, we came to a guide-post which showed it still to be seven kilometres on. But that was at the top of a long hill, and the road ran gently down through woods the whole way. The Colonel sent a message to play the light-hearted song of the "Men of Portree." The rain had stopped, and an evening sky unveiled a more cheerful light. So with an easy, inconsequent air we cast off care and tripped away down to the substantial and once prosperous bit of Rhineland called Hellenthal, well on our way to Cologne.

I had serious misgivings before entering Germany. My comrades vowed such vengeance on the people that I anticipated something worse than war. In theory, no treatment was going to be bad enough and cruel enough for the German. We were out to wreak on him four years' war-weariness ; we were ready to settle all the old scores of treachery on the field and mischance in the fight. What, therefore, was my surprise to find, after two or three days in Germany, all our roaring lions converted into sucking doves.

It was an extraordinary lesson in psychology—how, without too much prompting from officials, a whole nation comported itself to a victorious enemy army, and how that army, without any prompting whatever, took up an unexpected attitude of friendliness after vowing intense and everlasting hatred. Our authorities certainly expected a different attitude, for commanding officers had been asked to leave behind any specially bad characters who might be likely to get out of hand in enemy country, and we were all warned to stick to one another and not quarrel amongst ourselves, as we should need to preserve a united front in the country of the enemy. Every man in a billeting party was obliged to carry a revolver. Some units, I believe, made their entry into all towns and villages with fixed bayonets. But public opinion and atmosphere was different from what had been expected.

No, there was not much craft or cunning calculation in the German attitude to us. The

same attitude was to be found in the smallest and remotest villages as in the large towns. And in our army the reaction was the same in all the various units which I met afterwards at Cologne.

It is true that the German was rather afraid, though he seldom showed it in any of his actions. The German is rather reserved and secretive by nature—a great contrast to the Frenchman, who is nervous and expressive. After living years among the talkative and excitable French and Belgians, Tommy Atkins did not probe beneath the exterior calm of his German hosts.

Nevertheless fear was not very deep in the German either. His strongest feeling was one of relief that the war was over—on any terms. Our coming in was a secondary evil only. Then as regards his sensitive national pride, was he not able to nurse in secret the remembrance that he had held the world at bay, and had only given in at last because the odds were too great!

When we entered into the German houses we saw on many walls and shelves the photographs of German soldiers, and as we asked of each we learned the melancholy story—wounded, dead, dead, wounded. Death had paused at every German home. The women brought out their family albums and showed us portraits of themselves as they were before the war, and asked us to compare that with what they looked like now. And they showed us portraits of many German girls of whom we asked, “Where are they now?” and nearly always received the

answer, “ Todt, grippe ” (dead from influenza) ; so every soldier realised that German families had at least suffered equally with British families, and the thought rested in the mind.

We were soon seated at table with young German men who but a few weeks before had been enemies in the field. They were cold to us at first, but our engaging warmth soon cheered them out of their apathy. Though our fellows knew no German they set to work to make Fritz understand their questions by expletives in pigeon French, and all manner of gestures and mimicry, punctuated by guffaws of laughter and asides to one another.

We were all agog to find out where Fritz had fought against us, where we had faced one another.

“ You at Ypres ? ”

“ Moi aussi at Ypres.”

“ Compris Bourlon Wood ? Moi at Bourlon Wood.”

“ Bapaume ? Yes, I know that fine, M’sewer. He’s been at Bapaume. Wounded, M’sewer ? Twice ? Moi three times.”

Our fellows would unloose their tunics and show the scars on their bodies. The German boys would do the same. Then, being unable to express themselves, both would grin in a sort of mutual satisfaction.

At Hellenthal we talked till late at night with ex-soldiers of the Kaiser. I found a young man who had fought on the Russian front, and we compared places we both knew, the German

diving into his memory for the Russian phrases he had picked up, such as *chai peet* (to drink tea); *nitchovo* (that's all right); and *Ya ne poni mayu* (I don't understand). At Call, near Schmidtheim—terrible name for a place—we met a young man who had actually been opposed to our very unit in the Cambrai fighting of a year before. Wherever we went we made our exchanges, and, if anything, we found the private soldier of the German Army had had a more adventurous career than we had, and any man who had served any length of time had seen Russia and Macedonia, as well as both French and British battle-fronts in Western Europe. This testified to the mobility of the German Army, and to its restless energy in the devil's dance of conquering Europe. At Ermulheim a *demobilisé*, in answer to our persuasions, put on his uniform again to let us see what he looked like as a soldier; but the uniform was a new one, and he seemed to look too smart to be the real thing. We had never seen German soldiers in the smartness which no doubt they possessed well back behind the line, but were familiar only with the down-at-heel misery of prisoners, the sinister greyness of the enemy in front of us, or the shabbiness of the look of the dead.

We no longer referred to them as Huns now that we were in Germany. Innate goodness of feeling prevented the use of that name, though indeed the German was never Bosche nor Hun to the rank and file, but always "Jacky" or "Jerry" or "Fritz." We soon learned that

the Germans greatly disliked the appellation of "Bosche," which apparently was not absolutely meaningless but meant "ill-begotten," or something of the sort.

Racial affinity certainly greatly contributed to bring about this reconciliation between the rank and file and the German people they met. The cleanliness of German towns and villages and of the people, the fair complexions of the women, the first-class state of German civilisation from an artisan's point of view, all attracted after France. In the small shops the German women did not charge us three times the price and hand us out bad change. In the public-houses beer was twopence a jug and wine five marks the bottle : there was not one price for Germans and a much higher price for British soldiers. In places where we had to draw water there was every convenience for that end, and in any case, if there were pumps, the Germans did not take off the pump handles and make us walk half a kilometre for every pail of water. The Germans never offered us water at twopence a glass. Certainly the Germans were under watchful eyes and could not have played many tricks had they tried, and they were not left to their own devices and to the free exemplification of their character, as were the French and Belgians.

"Well, Stephen," said a dour Scottish corporal to me at Zulpich, "I have been four and a half years out here, and have lived in France and in Belgium and now in Germany, and I can tell you the people I feel nearest to me are these.

They are honester and cleaner, and somehow I feel I understand them better."

He was ordinarily a very reserved fellow, but I know he had hated the Germans.

I smiled, but I did not offer any comment. It is very fair to allow men to obtain a natural opinion and a first impression without the poison of war talk and propaganda. My corporal would modify his opinion later without the help of a reminder of Germany's war crimes.

In another talk to which I listened I heard also the following notable remark : "We don't hate them ; we leave that for the politicians and the people at home." The remark was followed by a hearty laugh.

In all this, however, our officers took little part. Attempts were made to stop fraternising, but it could not be prevented. The army cannot live in air-tight compartments on the Rhine. It is bound to live in the houses and shops and beer-halls and trams and cinemas, and to mix with Germans.

Some notion of the new atmosphere got to our padre. The padres had for four years been preaching, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword," but now they realised that since Armistice a larger message was available. Said our padre to me one day with relish :

"Next Sunday I am going to be very daring and preach a sermon on loving your enemies."

"Not a bad idea, sir," said I.

"The padre is going to give us a sermon on 'Love your enemies,'" said I to a knot of fellows.

They smiled.

“Tell him, ‘Before he joined,’ ” said they.
“Tell him, ‘Before he fluffed.’ ”

Hate is an impurity in the blood. It is intended to be discharged from the system. But there was never, even at the worst moment, much of it in the British composition.

It was not part of their blood
It came to them very late,

as Kipling says. Our Christianity does not yet extend to forgiving our enemies at once. The British way is to clear off old scores first, and then forgive, but all in a cheery spirit—not with bile and malice. Endeavour was made to cultivate hate in our ranks as a useful aid to fighting quality, and many stories, as we know, were circulated about the enemy with the idea of working up a useful hate. No doubt some hated. But when the armistice was signed and we got away into German territory, that hate passed easily away, leaving behind the good-humoured Tommy.

So we undoubtedly felt better in ourselves as we marched on to Cologne. We were more obstreperous, more noisy and wild in our ways, but also lighter in our steps, gayer in our hearts. We marched with a will—an army of optimists on the way home !

In the whole British Army our division marches the best. Other units will always turn out with respect to look at us going by, and it

is possible that our battalion was as good as any in the division, at least in the march to Cologne. We marched the whole way ; we were not given the doubtful privilege of going part of the way by train, as some battalions were. Boot leather was very scarce ; the weather was wet and the roads broken, but very few men fell out on the march, perhaps no more than three the whole way. On the road, at least when the weather was fine, we were a pleasure to the eye—all sparkling with polished brasses and bright buttons, all moving as one man, all platoons squared and trim.

We were thoroughly proud of ourselves, as if we ourselves had won the war, and we entered each German village with that air of conscious pride and with that *élan* which might well characterise the first British troops to enter. We believed always that we dazzled the Germans, and that they were rubbing their eyes and asking in surprise, “Are these the English whom we once despised ? We believed they had no soldiers who could make so handsome a turn-out.” And in this we were confirmed by our Colonel, who kept regarding us always on the march as if we were the apple of his eye and greatest spiritual treasure. How angry he became when motor-lorries or staff-captains’ cars came alongside us, spattering us with mud and breaking the long straight line of our external files. It gratified us intensely whenever he stopped a car and made it wait till we had all passed by.

Our songs broke forth whenever the pipers

ceased to lead us, and in merry mood we accomplished the last stages of our way. From Hellenthal we marched to the picturesque village of Blumenthal, with its castle on the hill, thence to Call, where the lager-beer was greatly appreciated. From Call we marched to the old town of Zulpich, with its fine towers. From Zulpich by Weiler to Erp, where the children watched us come in, hat in hand ; from Erp to Lechenich, and through a very sodden wood to the briquet factories of Hermulheim. Hermulheim is an outer suburb of Cologne, and but a few kilometres were needed to bring us to our billets in the German city. And we entered one morning in the sunshine—with only the *éclat* of our own smartness and our own triumph, having been over a month on the road since we left Maubeuge.

Some were billeted in schools, some in an old beer-house and theatre, and some found their way to the houses and the flats of the Germans, and made themselves comfortable. At first the centre of Cologne was out of bounds, and then it was made obligatory for us always to go about in twos in case of attack. But these restrictions quickly fell away, and we had the freedom of the city.

The streets were packed with our boys at night, with them and with the well-dressed Cologne crowd. There was no intercourse in the streets, no soldiers walking with civilians, but, on the other hand, no friction. Both seemed very pleased to see one another. Food was scarce, but everything else was in plenty and

not dear to buy, and it was the season of Christmas, and every shop had its soldiers within it, buying souvenirs and gifts. We were paid our wages in marks, reckoned as sevenpence each, and thus most objects exposed for sale seemed cheaper to our eyes than to the Germans.

“If you see a thing in a shop,” said an officer, “don’t enter into long discussions with the shop-keeper, but fix a price yourselves and buy it.” I believe this worked very well. I never heard of any trouble in the shops. Nobody in our rank and file could speak German. B—— the actor, who would have been at home with the Teutons, was in hospital, gassed. When I used the few words and phrases I had picked up on my travels, the others looked up to me admiringly, and often brought me in to interpret their desires.

However, it was in the various homes and back-parlours where we met the Germans more freely that our real exchange of thoughts and sentiments with them began.

Whilst the rank and file of all units rapidly established themselves on terms of comfort with the enemy, and were even ready warmly to defend him in argument, it was possible for one more cool in judgment to observe some curious facts concerning the psychology of the German in defeat.

The German reception, by reason of its warmth, was very baffling for Tommy Atkins. “Tell me,” said one, “is it true that German

mothers are bringing up their children to hate the English ; are they not teaching them that England is the enemy, and they must fight her when they grow up ? ”

The question was put to a very intelligent German engineer, who spoke English perfectly, a man who had supervised his own engineering contracts all over the world. We were billeted upon him, and he and his wife certainly treated us very kindly.

He frowned over the question, paused a moment, and then answered emphatically :

“ No, it is not true. German mothers are only teaching their children that there must never be another war.”

He began a discussion of the merits of the war. He said he was glad we had won and so put an end to the strife. He did not think the private soldier at all responsible.

“ You are commanded to fight,” said he, “ and you obey. It is the same with us. We are commanded, and we obey. I imagine it is much the same with you as with us : ‘ You pay, you obey, but you have no say.’ ”

“ Quite right, mister, quite right,” said a chorus of fellows, whose simple minds saw no guile in such a thought.

“ We lost, and so we must pay,” the German continued with a smile.

At Christmas every German house had its Christmas tree, even houses where there were no children. Many hours were spent elaborately decking them.

"I suppose you'll have a good spread at Christmas, anyway," said a Tommy. "In England they are going on double rations."

"No," said the German, "we shall only have a Christmas tree and a few glass balls."

"Oh, I'm d—— sorry to hear that," said Tommy.

"Don't be sorry," said Fritz. "You won the war; we lost it. Had we won and you lost, then we should have had double rations, and you would have had a Christmas tree and a few glass balls."

At a large house at another part of Cologne, a questing sergeant of Newfoundland arrived with a platoon of his men. The owner, a Westphalian millionaire, addressed the soldiers in this wise :

"Yes, you may come into my house. All I ask is that you keep away from the women. Including my wife and daughters and the servants, there are twenty-one women here, but everything else is at your disposal. And I am under no illusion about the war. You won, and I expect you to behave as men who have won. It is no small thing to have defeated Germany in the field. In fact, gentlemen, I congratulate you on your victory, which has saved Germany. To show that I am sincere, I have sent to my cellar for champagne, and with my own hands I propose to pour for you whilst my wife and daughters shall wait on you."

Thereupon he suited the action to the word, and, as the sergeant said touchingly, he would not

allow a man to drink twice from the same glass, but always had a clean glass provided.

The adventures of the various units of the Army of Occupation have been manifold and curious and rare. A quartermaster-sergeant of Canadians billeted the whole of his company in a new hospital, and every soldier had a new bed and virginal sheets and palliasse, and the nurses cooked for them and looked after them, and generally bewildered them with kindness, though they were in themselves bitterly indignant at the use to which the hospital was put. Our wild boys responded to the treatment like doves.

“How do you account for it?” I asked the sergeant. “If any hated the German more ruthlessly than others it was you.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said he. “They just knocked us off our Gawd-damned feet.”

And that was so, I suppose.

If Tommies are seen marching out with German girls, both parties are put under arrest. But in the houses and in other private places the women are exceedingly forward. They do not display the hate or coldness or bitterness which one would naturally expect from women towards those who had killed husbands, brothers, sons, sweethearts. The young girls are all bringing their albums, and, generally speaking, hanging round Tommy’s neck, and the elder ones are fussing about fires and beds and chairs to give him comforts. For themselves, they have little food and little hope of any kind, but they are not in any way depressed. The sense of guilt, of moral

wrong, is absent. All they know is they have played a game ; they have lost, and they are giving up what is forfeit—that is all. And there is one great compensation—an Allied army is saving the community from a Spartacist revolution.

“ Honour to the victors and to the liberators of Germany ! That’s all very well,” said a hard-hearted captain one night. “ But I must have this matter out with mine host.”

So he sent for the owner of the house, who appeared suave and smiling in the mess.

“ I’m pleased to see you,” said the captain, “ though, of course, you understand me, not really pleased in any way. But take a seat. Now, I want to ask you a lot of questions. You’ve been treating our army here in Cologne pretty well, I admit, and there is no complaint. But how was it that you allowed our prisoners to return home so unfriended, uncared for, unfed ? How do you account for the treatment of our men in the prison-camps and in the places where they were forced to work ? How do you account for the atrocities your people have committed ? Your women are very friendly to us, but will you explain to me the stories of what you did to French and Belgian women during your occupation of their towns ? You are very polite, but how do you account for the behaviour of your submarine commanders ? You say you believe in a League of Nations, but how do you account for your Government’s deliberate encouragement of Armenian massacres, etc. etc. ? ”

The German shrugged his shoulders, and grew more and more pale and taciturn. He could not answer.

“ Well,” said the captain, “ you’ll have to pay for it all now, to the last farthing and the last brass button on the soldier’s coat.”

The German seemed slightly relieved.

“ How much will it be ? ” he asked.

“ It is estimated at twenty-four thousand millions sterling,” said the captain.

“ Twenty-four thousand millions sterling,” said the German deliberately, and with that he stood up, for it was late at night. “ Twenty-four thousand millions—very well. We will pay it, and the account will be cleared.”

With that he waved his hand comprehensively.

“ Good-night ! ” said he with dignity, and walked out.

I often asked myself the question in Cologne, Why has the German a good conscience ? He had a bad conscience during the war ; he has no right to a good conscience now. Our soldiers gaily marching from street to street, our soldiers singing in beer-houses and billets, had good consciences. But they, with duty done and a good cause, had every right to them. The Germans ought to have been obsessed with the wrong they had done humanity.

I think possibly the German sang-froid was due to the manifest way in which British, French, and Italian Governments in the hour of victory

were showing themselves false to the great ideals of the war. The Germans could take to themselves the consolation that their enemies were showing themselves every whit as greedy and materialistic as they themselves had been. Germany had evolved the great selfishness and injustice of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, but at Paris we were preparing a treaty for which Brest-Litovsk might well have served as model. I noticed that whenever we spoke to a German about the war from an ideal point of view, he seemed uncomfortable and uneasy. He was most anxious to deny an ideal point of view as existing in the Allies. His favourite point of view was of the European powers as gamblers risking their fortune in the chance of war and diplomacy. Germany had lost, and as in "honour bound" would pay the forfeit. If President Wilson was favoured in German minds, it was because the German thought that he would fool the Allies into a gentler settlement or that he would cause the Allies to quarrel among themselves.

And whilst we were at Cologne the British General Election, which practically left the soldier without a voice in the State, accomplished itself in all its dishonouring vulgarity, with its cries of "Make the German pay!" and "Hang the Kaiser!" Thanks to that election, Great Britain came to the Conference Table at Paris with no moral voice, no ideals—only with a notion of bargaining and of sheltering herself from responsibility behind either Clemenceau or President Wilson. Was it not a disgrace to our political

and governmental system—to come to Paris without Christian principle or national dignity, after all the sufferings, all the deaths for the cause?

The army, that is, the rank and file, was more honourable, and knew better what it wanted.

“I am a married man,” I hear one of our grizzled veterans saying. “I have four children. I’ve been out here three years, and it has been hell. But if the armistice were called off tomorrow, I’d gladly go on fighting. Why? In order that we might make a clean job of it. All I care for is that my boys shall not have to go through what I’ve gone through. We don’t want to fight it all over again in ten years’ time—we want to make the world safe once for all. Else what are we fighting for at all? Germany ought to be shown that force of arms does not pay. Her army ought first to be crushed and then completely disarmed. And Krupps’ factories at Essen and elsewhere ought to be destroyed. . . .”

How often have I listened to such talk. That is what the soldier-in-arms has thought in his heart, without prompting.

The greatest indemnity dreamed of would not add up to the demilitarisation of Europe; nor is it decent to talk loudly of the payment of our expenses when the largest part of such expense is the men who in millions have been killed in the war. To arrange a sort of bargain-peace between the Allies themselves, and with the Central Powers, the sort of peace which leaves

Europe an armed camp, would be the foulest injustice to those who have fought and to those who have died in the fight.

Moreover, the Europe we are coming back to in peace is going to be a miserable place, where lies and cynicism and greed will be the main characteristics of public life, if our ideals are not ratified in the results of the victory. Public virtue will become a laughing-stock ; democracy will continue to be stampeded as by war-loan publicity campaigns and the election rampages of ambitious demagogues ; there will be more evil standards in politics, literature, art, morals, finance.

That does not deeply concern us, however, at the moment of our arrival in Cologne. The significance of the moment for us is victory and the justification not only of our own sacrifices, but of the sacrifices of all, and of all who lie buried by the way.

XV

THE FINEST THING IN THE ARMY

FOR most people Cologne is the river Rhine and the Cathedral. The rather imposing commercial splendour of modern Cologne only testifies to German commercialism. But the Rhine is a great national river and the cathedral is a great Catholic temple, a monument, if not of to-day's religion, at least of religion past. So on Christmas Eve I looked upon the river, and acknowledged that, though we came as victors, we did not come vaingloriously, but rather with a great thankfulness to God that through us Germany and Europe could be free. Whilst the shops blazed with light, and the advertisement toys revolved in shop-windows of the city, attracting the gaze of the Christmas crowd, I was, with a few other lads in khaki, in the quietude and dim light of the cathedral — expecting somehow that this year in Europe a Child should be born.

The fifth Christmas had arrived, and with it the victory of the cause, and a seeming happy issue out of our afflictions. Some twelve million English-speaking men had worn the uniform of the soldier and borne his heavy burden, and

it might be said of many a battalion and regiment that more of its number lay now buried beneath the white crosses in France than were alive to regard the mild star of hope and peace. And of those who survived, who was there who had not suffered in the war? On a mountain of suffering our ark had come to rest. Nevertheless, it was not of the suffering but of the victory that we thought. Christmas was a first Christmas again. We would not put on mourning on Christmas Day and go to the graves, but we should understand that if it was a glorious day for the living it was a more glorious one still for the dead, for they were justified in their sacrifice, and they had not died in vain.

It had seldom worked out so happily in history before. Endless sacrifice for the ideal had been made throughout the ages, and the page of the history-book recorded ever how wickedness had thriven on virtue, and greediness had grown after unselfishness. But behold, in one of the grandest episodes in our human history that which men had died for and suffered for in largest number seemed about to come to pass. This Christmas of victory we forgot for a moment the sufferings and brutalisms of war, and rejoiced, not by ourselves, but with all those who had passed the bounds of our vision, yet who, nevertheless, were with us *now* as they were with us *then*.

We felt it should be an *altogether-Christmas*, when we should try to realise the spirit and the presence of all the absent, not only those from whom for a few weeks and months we might be

still separated, not only those we knew of whom Omar wrote so lovingly,

Lo ! some we loved, the loveliest and best
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest ;

not only these, but those we never knew face to face, the thousands of “lonely soldiers” of humanity, who with few friends have fought with us for one and the same great cause. Let us be one with them !

In the summer and autumn we marched over the great zone of the destruction which marks the old battle-fields, and as the German relaxed his grasp on ridge after ridge and horizon past horizon, we saw that which we desired to see—la belle France liberated. We came to the virginal, little-touched interior country, where the red roofs were on the cottages and all around the spires of parish churches pointed heavenward, where the fields were not pitted with shells, but carefully ploughed or harvested. We slogged along the road, footsore and gay, and one commonly heard the remark, “We don’t mind how many miles we go *this way*.” The delight at seeing the happy valleys of the beyond-country was intoxicating. I heard one man exclaim on one occasion with true emotion :

“What price this for the Promised Land !”

That was an expression of our first impulse of excitement; but we camped there and got used to it, and read the papers and hung on President Wilson’s words for many weeks, and perhaps

forgot what it had been to come there from the heaps of decaying bricks and stone and the smell of the dead in the old "Somme Country." But my mind recurred constantly to the groves of white crosses where our dead lay buried, and to the thousands of graves where the unknown lay. What a number of these we passed on our way ! Wretched broken-down crosses, with their legends written, or rather scrawled, in copying-ink pencil : "Here lie 16 British heroes." "Here lie two officers and twenty men, British—names unknown." "Here lies an unknown British soldier"; or in German, as was often the case, "Hier ruht in Gott ein Englander," or simply "Ein Englander," or "Englisch soldat," or "English unbekannt," or as I saw one grave, German dug, "Anonymous England, 3—21.3.1918." What an enormous number of graves bore that fatal date, March 21 ! Such crosses, without particulars, are generally called "Lonely Soldiers," and much love is always lavished on them by the private soldier bringing wild flowers to them, making formal gardens round them of glass and chalk. There is a feeling that the unknown dead have made a deeper and a sweeter sacrifice than even those who perished and were known and were buried "with name and number." There is a pathos about the dead who have neither number nor name, and in reacting to it the soldier's instinct is true. Theirs has been that holiest sacrifice, and it is fitting we should carry the brightest tokens of victory and put them on the grave of—Anonymous England.

What the war has done ! At the worst it came like a curse to humanity. At the best it brought us closer together, and made us bear suffering in common. It has made us intimate with many strangers. In the army the nation was more "altogether" than it had ever been before—or will easily be again. And at humanity's board, perhaps, the nations who were allied found themselves nearer to one another in friendship.

The hardest lesson of army discipline is the suppression of individuality, the unconditional surrender of the individualistic *ego* to the will of the nation. It is true that when that surrender has been made peace is at hand. But what a chapter of sufferings, mental and physical, before the mind and soul are willing to make that surrender ! Yes, the uniform of the King, whilst it enlarges and increases some, making "men" into "temporary gentlemen," does narrow and straiten others, making "gentlemen" to be temporarily "men." It cuts them down, reduces them to humble equality with those whom in the old days they had outstripped. And yet, as a whole is greater than its part, the reduction is only an illusion. The contrary is really true, and nationally the uniform makes one larger. But that one can only know—after peace and self-renunciation. One has become part of the chorus of the nation, with the sense of a large number thinking and doing altogether. There is a good French word for being individualistic ; it is *gauche*, and *gaucherie* means a sort of left-handedness, a being out of step.

The march and the sufferings come easier, too, when one is in step. The army as a whole, the nation as a whole, helps to bear your sufferings. For indeed men have suffered things in this war which no individual "on his own" could possibly endure. But our men have endured them because others were suffering with them, all around them, and there was a common power of strength sustaining them all.

The hardest thing for the nations also has been to hear the drum-beat of Christianity, and whether they have heard it is not certain; the self-sacrifice, the long process of learning to fall into line, and to march in step together. As with the individual soldier, so with the individual rebellious nation, unconditional surrender to the common weal of humanity can alone give lasting peace.

Some soldiers from the first had a greater sense of the honour of their regiment and of the army and of the nation for whom they fought than others. They were ready to die for the greater body to which they belonged and for the greater cause to which all were dedicated. They had the patience which this sense demanded. They had the forbearance not to tread with too rough foot upon a grave or to touch with less respect the bodies of the fallen. They had a spirit of self-sacrifice which prompted them to outbid their comrades in the doing of dangerous tasks. Though the brutal aspects of the war and of Army life are so crying one must not forget those bright spirits in the ranks or in command.

For they gave a positive aspect to the whole, a ground of hope on which a new Army, a new Nation and a new Humanity could be built. Their life was sometimes praised as "Camaraderie," the sense of comradeship; sometimes as "Devotion to Duty," sometimes as "Valour." It was most truly Christianity; for does not Christianity mean the suffering of the *One* that *All* may have more life, the bread and wine of the New Testament which makes us all one Body and one Spirit? It was most commonly called nothing at all, and passed unnoticed. But it is *Esprit de Corps*, the honour and the spirit of the whole; *Esprit de Corps*, which at its highest and best and widest and profoundest becomes *Saint Esprit*,

the one spirit of the mighty whole,
The spirit of the martyrs and the saints.

Those vile camping-grounds, those disgusting trenches and bloody frays, the bullying, the foul thoughts and words and deeds of the war—not much of the Spirit in all these! No, the Spirit was often lost in those, and it was crushed out by the system. But there was a Spirit in the midst of us all. And whilst we remember the cruelty and sordidness, the petty tyranny and the impurity, there will nevertheless come a time when, recalling the way and the march and the Spirit in our midst, we shall ask of our old comrades as did one apostle of another at Emmaus, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way!"

INDEX

A.C. means "accepted Christ," 66-
 67
 Adinfer, 203
 Adjutant: a hard adjutant means a
 hard sergeant-major, 114
 Advance of August 1918, 223, 259
 seq.
 Air raids, 100
 Alexandra, Queen, 100
 "All the blue bonnets are over the
 Border," 320
 "All we ever do is sign the pay-
 roll," 208
 American Relief Committee, 203
 Americans, 40 seq., 59, 98, 133, 208;
 opposed to work, 59
 Amour propre, 63
 Ancient Sparta, comparison with,
 79
 Angels whisper, 75
 Arbre de la Femme, 282
 Ardennes, 311
 Armistice Day, 291, 315
 Arms presented, 106; reversed,
 107
 Armstrong, the gardener and wrest-
 ler, 170
 Army, conditions, 29, 76-77, 123,
 154; like public schools, regular,
 14, 30, 151
 Arras, 199
 Ascension Day, 206
 Atmosphere of barracks, 48
 Atrocities committed in advance,
 139, 325
 Atrocity stories, 222
 Attitude to the dead, 234, 238 seq.
 Attitude to the enemy, 216
 August 1914 repeating itself, 134

Australians, 16
 B_____, the actor of St. Louis, 43,
 266-267
 B_____, the musical composer, 38
 Banks Reserve, 265
 Baths, 61, 85, 117
 Battle-fields, 240 seq.
 Bavai, 288
 Beer, giving it away, 306
 Belgians, 167
 Belgium, entering, 301; joy days
 in, 304 seq.
 Bernard the vocalist, 40
 Bigsey, the policeman from Phila-
 delphia, 271
 Bill Browns, 24, 33, 122, 138, 265,
 277
 Boesinghe, 179
 Bombs and bombing, 78, 119, 164-
 165
 Booby trap, 209
 Bourlon Wood, 57, 179, 241, 268,
 327
 Boussières, 274
 Brain versus cause, 265
 Brass band, vulgarity of, 99, 136
 Brooke, 149, 195
 Browning, 202
 Brutalising effect of war, 212 seq.
 Buckingham Palace, 102
 Bulgaria, surrender of, 272
 Bullying, 27
 Bumble and Buck, 186
 Burns quoted by men, 158
 Byng Boys, 179
 "By their sacrifice we live," 12
 Calais, 166
 Campbell, R. J., 90

Campbell's poems, 193	Demobilisation, first lecture on, 294
Canadians, 16, 53, 145-146, 337	Derby men, 131
Canal du Nord, 269	Dickens, 193
Carnières, funeral at, 279	Dirt, removing, 82-83
Cartigny, 170 <i>seq.</i>	Discipline, 1-21, 154 <i>seq.</i> , 295
Cecil, Lord Hugh, quoted, 105	"Doing one's damndest," 194
Cemeteries, 147, 312, 346	"Donald Blue," 108
Champagne, discovery in cellar, 177	Drafts, 129 <i>seq.</i> , 198 <i>seq.</i>
Chaplains, 92, 103, 105, 145-146, 161, 188-189, 250-258, 330	Drill, 25, 48, 51, 62, 113, 161; competition, 120
"Charge, Chester, charge!" 194	Drill-sergeants, 4, 214
Chessmen, original pieces made on battle-field, 251	Drocourt, 241
Chesterton, Cecil, 149	Dusty Smith, 182
Chivalry, 216	Duty, 13
Christians, 254	Easter at Havre, 138-139
Christmas at Cologne, 335, 343; in the trenches, 153	Écoust, 242, 268
Civil Church, compared with Church parade, 103	Editing battalion records, 149
Civilians, 23, 63, 82 <i>seq.</i>	Effigies, 287, 316
Cleavage between Christianity and military service, 105	England, 103
Cléry, 170	Entrenching tools, 117
Cockney, best soldier in a Highland regiment, 34	Escaremain, 287
Cologne, 331-342; cathedral, 343	Esprit de corps, 96, 110-126, 159, 349
Colours, the, 106	Estinne au Mont, 301
Common sense and <i>esprit de corps</i> , 123	Esturmel, 273
Conan Doyle's poem on Loos, 56	Example, making an, 154 <i>seq.</i>
Conrad, not read by rank and file, 195	Exiles returning to their homes, 283-286, 300
Conscience and Duty, 79	Fergie, 276
Conscience of the Germans, 339	Festubert, battle of, 154, 156, 217
Conscripts, 14	Fier comme un Écossais, 150
C.O.'s orderly, 214-215	Fighting Germany in Germany's way, 20
Crevecœur, 273	First parade, 51
Crown-and-Anchor, the game of, 185 <i>seq.</i>	Fitz of Virginia, 42, 137, 199, 261, 267, 278
Danse de joie, 307	Fontaine l'Évêque, 304
Dead, the, 238 <i>seq.</i>	Forgiving enemies, 162
Death, cheapness of, 9	Fourth Brigade of Guards, 202
Death penalty, army founded on, 154	Fraternising with Germans, 153, 326-339
"Decategorizing" a musician, 40	French Canadians, 145, 241; girls, 204 <i>seq.</i> ; peasants, 167, 203, 283; women, 203
December 18, 1914, raid of, 152	Frontier of Germany, 320
Delivery of the French population, 276-277	Funerals, 107, 279
	Gambling, 185-187
	Gardens of Cartigny, 171 <i>seq.</i>
	Garvice, 196
	Gas, effects of, 279

Gaucherie, 347
 General A——, 91
 George and the Dragon, 104
 German girls, 337
 German rear-guards, 264
 Germanisms, 286
 Germans, 15, 239, 315 *seq.*; compared with French and Belgians, 329
 "Getting down to it," 117, 119
 Girls, 120
 "Giving a steady one," 216
 Glory, new type of, 151
 "God's in His heaven, the Guard's in the line," 202
 "Good-b'ye and spare none," 137
 Good Friday, 135-136
 "Go, tell to Sparta," 12 *seq.*
 Gouzeaucourt, Guards saved day at, 133, 179 *seq.*
 Grandecourt, 169
 Gray's *Elegy*, 193
 Grievances, 125
 Guards, 16, 199, 331; Chapel, 102; Guards never retire, 208

H——, who wished to charge with the Guards, 44, 137, 265, 275
 Hackneyed quotations, 193
 Hall Caine, 195
 Hardy's *Dynasts*, 185
 Harlaw, March of the Battle of, 323
 Hate, 331
 Haussy, shelling the returning exiles near, 283
 Havrincourt, 272
 Hazebrouck Road, battle of, 201
 Hellenthal, 324
 Hermulheim, 333
 "Her pay-day," 120
 "Hey, Johnny Cope," 108
 Highlanders, 137, 165, 276
 Highland Light Infantry heroes, 270
 History of battalion, 149 *seq.*
 History, soldiers' ignorance of, 197
 Hohenzollern Redoubt, 154, 165
 Humiliation, 57, 58
 Hymns, applied to duties, 108-109; parodies of, 50
 "I don't mind dam-well fighting . . ." 165

"I heard the pibroch sounding, sounding," 323
 Ignorance, 191 *seq.*
 "Immortal Eighty," 156
 Impressions of war's ruin, 147, 203, 226 *seq.*, 268
 Impurity, 76, 80
 Indecent language, 57, 76
 Indemnities, 341
 Inhumanity, man's, to man, 158
 "Innocent lures," 205
 Inspection, at barrack-gate, 74; by the King, 62
 Institutionalism, baleful shadow of, in Army, 123
 Instructors, 28, 30, 67, 111
 Jerry, who sang like massed barrel-organs, 46, 47, 49, 86
 "Jimmy," the deadly foe of humbug, 215
 Jocks, 33, 43, 122
 Joe, the stupidest man in Little Sparta, 45, 46
 Justice, 19
 K——, Ensign, at St. Python, 277
 "Kidney," 182
 "Killing Huns," 217
 "Kill or cure," 22, 64
 King, his inspection of us at Little Sparta, 62; King's Guard, 96, 97 *seq.*, 112; loyalty to the King, 94-95; understanding of, 94, 106, 197
 Kitchener's Army, 14, 131, 154
 "Knocking civvies into shape," 28

L——, nicknamed Creeping Barrage, 250-254
 Labour men's credulity, 139
 Lagnicourt, 269
 Last Post, 107
 Laventi, 157
 Les Bœufs, 169
 Letters on the battle-field, 246
 Life below stairs, 121
 "Little Sparta," 22-81, 111-112
 "Lonely soldiers," 346
 Loos, 32, 56, 154, 165
 "Lord Lovat's Lament," 323

Loving one's enemies, 255, 330
 Luck, 186

 Machine-gunnery, 78
 Machines versus machines, 151
 March 21, 1918, 133, 346
 Marchiennes au Pont, 304
 Marching, 140, 167, 295 *seq.*, 331
 Maubeuge, 288, 295
 "Men of Portree," 324
 Millet, 207
 "Missing," 247
 Mœuvres, 241
 Monchy-au-bois, 203
 Monuments to the dead, 11 *seq.*
 Mormal, forest of, 287
 "Morning of Europe," 80
 Mottoes for soldiers' graves, 11
Mr. Britling sees it through, 195
 Munition manufacturer, sorrows of, 88 *seq.*

 Nails, keeping them clean, 61
 Names of the dead, 104
 N.C.O.'s, 115, 155, 214
 "Nelson's last signal," 194
 Neuve Chapelle, 154, 159
 "Never catch the sergeant's eye," 28
 New Zealand men, 23
 Nicknames, 66, 181 *seq.*, 187
 Night, in the barrack-room, 50, 73 ; over the ruins, 233
 Nobby Clark, 182
 "No, for I have heard the nightingale itself," 80
 Noreuil, 241, 268

 Obedience, 57
 Occupied area, 273, 281
 Officers, 17, 91
 Officialdom, 10, 14
 "Oh, Cromwell, Cromwell . . .," 194
 "Oh, Europe, where are thy children ?" 249

 Paris leave, the way it was spent, 252
 Peace, by mutual consent of rank and file, 153 ; rumours of coming, 280 ; treaty, 340-342

Peronne, 169
 Pilkel Ridge, 179
 Pipes, 99, 318 *seq.*
 Poets of the battalion, 156, 218, 238
 Polish, 59 *seq.*, 97
 "Polyphemus wants you," 125
 Presbyterianism—the true religion, 102
 Presenting arms, 106
 President compared with King, 195
 Price, Captain, V.C., 201
 Pride in the regiment, 122
 Prisoners, 3, 33, 139, 217, 219, 272, 284, 299
 Private X, court-martial and execution of, 155 *seq.*
 Pronville, 241
 Punishment, 18, 61, 68
 Purity, 29, 256
 "Putting the wind up the men," 216

 Queant, 241, 244
 Queen, the, 106 ; the "mobled," 251

 Rags, 157
 Railway, building a, 169
 Reading, 196
 Red, the American volunteer, 42
 Retreat, precautions for, 208
 Revolutionary propaganda, 101
 Ribecourt, 272
 Robbery, 177, 296-297
 Roman Catholics, 145-146
 Rumour, 139, 280, 292, 317
 Russia, 132, 328

 St. Gerard, German cemetery at, 312
 St. Hilaire, 274
 St. Leger, 268
 St. Python, 276
 St. Vaast, 274, 284-285
 S_____, the financial expert, 45
 "Saki," 149
 Saluting, 62
 Sand-bag king, 178
 Savages, imitation of, in raid, 261
 School, sergeants', 54
 Scott, 193

Scottish prejudice in favour of Scots, 33
 Second Division, 283
 Self-respect defined, 64
 Sentries, 119
 Sepmuries, 287
 Sergeant-majors, 28, 98, 110 *seq.*, 120, 156, 213-214
 Sergeants, 28, 30 *seq.*, 112
 Sergeant Three, the humorous instructor, 34-35, 51-54
 Sermon on the Mount, not available for chaplains during the war, 255 ; but available after armistice, 330
 "Service of Caesar is service of God," 105
 Seventh Division, 150
 Shakespeare quoted, 6
 Shaw, G. B., recruit's ignorance of, 195
 Shooting at dawn, 163-164
 Slang, 182 *seq.*
 Sleep, 73
 Smartness, 59 *seq.*, 64
 Snookey-ookums, 55
 Soldiery, 78
 Solesmes, 274
 Sombrin, 208
 Somme, battle of, 167
 Songs, 49, 128
 Songster, the scapegoat, 37, 65 *seq.*
 Souvenirs, 153, 253-255
 Spartacism, 338
 Spot Fraser, 182
 Squaring, 57, 114, 129
 State and Soldier, 105
 "Stupid to the point of piety," 204
 Stupidity promoted, 6
 Surrender, 18
 Swank-parade, 55
 Swearing, 28, 29, 76, 180
 Symbols of the army, 106
 Sympathy-killers, 215
 Taffies, 3, 24, 49, 138
 Taking no prisoners, policy of, 217
 Tanks, 265
 Taverns, 157
 Tchaikovsky's "1812," 323
 "Teddie," present King referred to as, 197
 "Thank God we've got a Navy," 53
 Thanksgiving service at Maubeuge, 295
 "Their Name liveth for evermore," 13
 "The men are splendid," 191
 "There must never be another war," 335
 Thermopylae, 81
 Thinking evil, 220
 Thomas Edward, 149
 "Thou shalt not kill," 3
 Timber Wood, 182
 Time, 87
 Times, not read by rank and file, 196
 Tolstoy and War, 20
 Tom the Grenadier, 184
 Tommy's French, 286, 327
 Toothbrush, 61
 "Touch me not with impunity," 55
 Trade Unions, 181
 Train for the Front, 141 *seq.*
 Trenches, the, 11
Trio juncta in uno, 54, 117
 Tug Wilson, 182
 Uniform, 84, 123, 170, 212-213, 346
 V.C.'s, 9, 45, 155
 Veterans, 152
 Victory, emblem of a stuffed cock, 287
 Villers Pol, 288
 Violoncellist who would not cut his hair, 40
 Voice, the, 214
 Walloons, 311
 War's ruins, 147, 203, 226 *seq.*, 268
 Washing off the barracks, 82 *seq.*
 Wells, H. G., 195
 "What price this for the Promised Land," 345
 Wiggs, Mrs., sometimes called Bigsey, 271
 Wilson's fourteen points accepted, 280
 Winning the war by numbers, 39
 Wire-cutters, 17
 Wives, 74, 80, 129, 131
 Wolfe, General, 193
 Word of command, 213

356 A PRIVATE IN THE GUARDS

Working-men in khaki, 5, 37, 60, 69, 181, 190 <i>seq.</i>	“ You pay, you obey, but you have no say,” 335
Worst characters put in bombing company, 165	You're for it, or you're not for it, 128
Wounded, killing the, 3, 219	Ypres, 150, 167, 327
Y, the ruthless sergeant-major, 155 <i>seq.</i>	Zitter, marching through forest of, 322
Y.M.C.A., 66	Zulpich, 329

THE END

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